

Southwest

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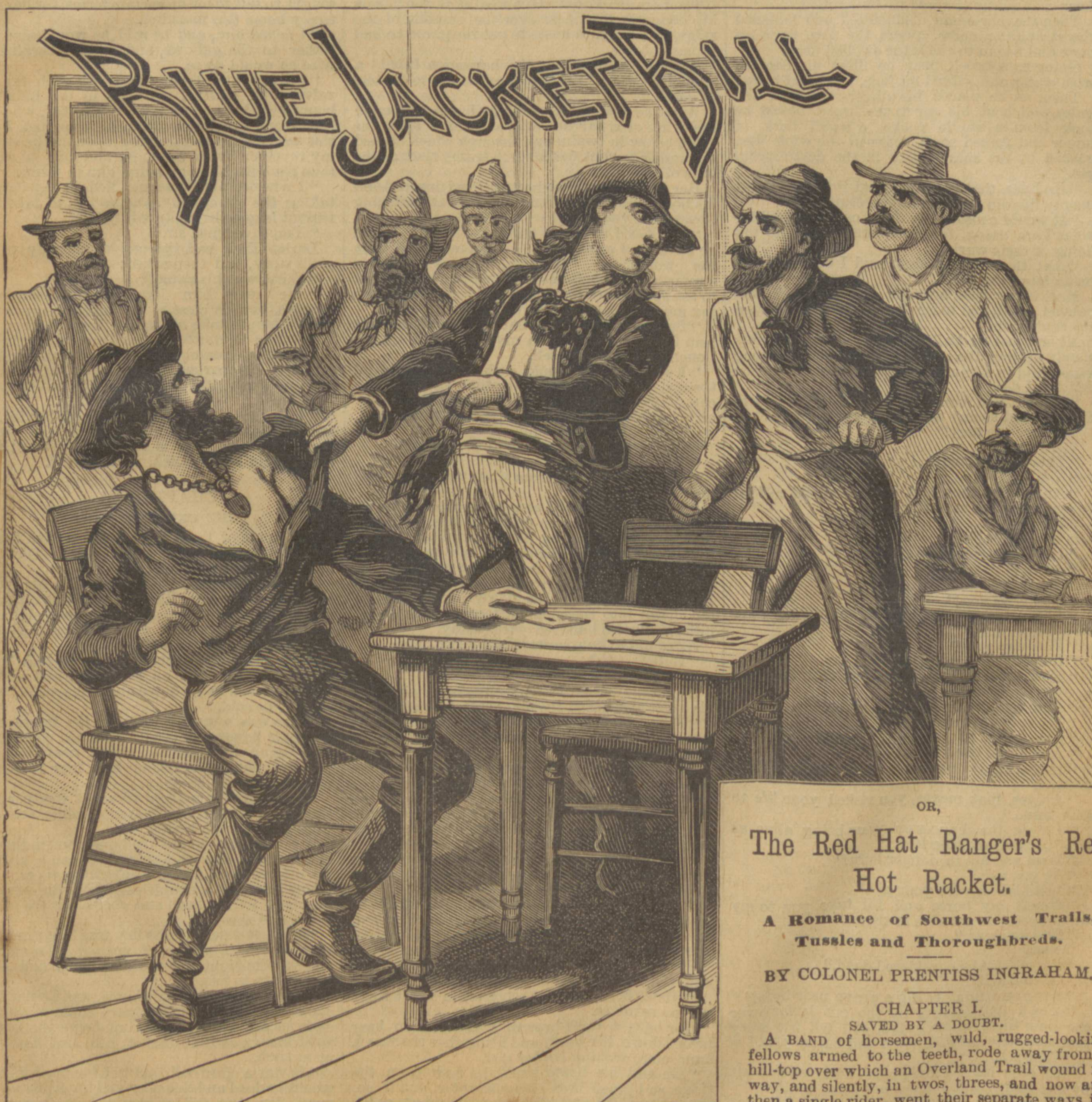
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OR,

## The Red Hat Ranger's Red Hot Racket.

A Romance of Southwest Trails,  
Tussles and Thoroughbreds.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

### CHAPTER I.

SAVED BY A DOUBT.

A BAND of horsemen, wild, rugged-looking fellows armed to the teeth, rode away from a hill-top over which an Overland Trail wound its way, and silently, in twos, threes, and now and then a single rider, went their separate ways into the wilds of a mining country in borderland.

"MEN, THERE IS MY PROOF! THE CHAIN COLLAR OF THE BLUE JACKETS!" CRIED REDFERN.



What they left behind them was a scene to send a thrill of horror through the blood of one who beheld it, for the rosy rays of the setting sun fell upon a human form suspended in mid-air, and gently swaying to and fro with a motion as easy as the throbs of life passing out of the body of the one whose end had been thus tragic.

One of the horsemen who left the spot where a tragedy had been enacted, rode slowly along a trail which no one else of the party followed.

He was dressed as a miner, with woolen shirt, top boots, corduroy pants, and a slouch hat.

He came to a halt before he had ridden very far, and seemed lost in deepest meditation.

Then he mused aloud:

"My doubt increases each moment that they hanged the right man. I will return and see if he is dead."

Quickly he wheeled his horse and rode back to the fateful spot.

There swung the body, to and fro, like a huge pendulum marking the seconds of ebbing life.

The sun was on the horizon now, and its glow falling upon the pallid face of the victim of man's inhumanity to man, caused the horseman to start and say aloud:

"He is not dead! I will cut him down."

He rode near at once, his bowie severed the lariat that served as a hangman's rope and the form was gently lowered to the ground.

Then the horseman dismounted and loosened the strangling noose, spread the man upon his back and began to chafe the swollen neck.

Going to a brook near he filled his canteen with water and bathed his face, head and chest.

Then, as he placed his finger-tips upon the pulse, and bent his ear to the broad breast he took from a saddle pocket a small flask of liquor and forced some between the white lips, gashed by the sharp teeth in the death-struggle.

"He lives, that is certain; but this would cost me my life did the Vigilantes return."

"It would cause me to fight, or be hanged for what I am doing, for these men stand no undoing of their work."

"Ah! there was a sigh, and I believe I can bring him around."

More water was brought and the neck was rubbed hard, and more liquor forced between the shut teeth.

At last just as twilight was falling, the eyes slowly opened, the breast rose and fell in strong gasps, and in a hoarse whisper came the words:

"Am I dead?"

"No, but you came as near it not to be in Shadowland as any one I ever knew, pard."

"Where are they?"

"All gone."

"They hanged me?"

"Yes."

"And found they had made a mistake—that I was the wrong man?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I had my doubts, so returned."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"God bless you!"

"I hope the prayer may serve me, for I am an awful sinner."

"Who are you?"

"One of the Vigilantes."

"Yes, I recall your face; but that does not answer my question."

"I am a miner hunting a fortune."

"What is your name?"

"I am called in the camps Lariat Dick."

"And I owe my life to you?"

"If the Vigilantes do not come back and hang us both."

"Ah yes, that means, you risked your life to save mine."

"I took the chances on your being alive, as your neck was not broken."

"Then you are in danger here?"

"As you are."

"I can leave, with your aid."

"Mount my horse and I'll take you to my camp until you get able to travel."

"One moment?"

"Yes."

"I must still be considered dead."

"Of course."

"Are you willing to dig a grave near here?"

"Yes, I understand, for the cut lariat over the limb there, and a grave, will tell the story that some one cut you down and buried you."

"That is it."

"I'll soon dig a grave, pard, and you can sit by and thank God you are not going to fill it."

"But for you I would have done so. I am not one to forget," was the low reply.

The grave was dug, a log rolled in a blanket placed in it, and then it was filled in and stones piled on top to keep the coyotes out.

Then the man who had so narrowly escaped death, mounted the horse of his rescuer, the latter led the way and they moved off in the darkness on a trail leading into the mountains.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SETTLER'S DAUGHTER.

A WEEK after the scene just described, two men are winding their way up a rugged trail toward the summit of a range of hills.

One was far in advance of the other and on foot, the other following, and mounted, but riding slowly.

The pedestrian was he who had called himself Lariat Dick, while the rider was the man who had been hanged by the Vigilantes of Colorado.

They were many miles now from the scene where one had so nearly lost his life, and, still enfeebled, the rescuer was taking him by easy stages to his home.

Suddenly the horseman saw the one in advance halt, then spring to the top of a rock and bring his rifle to his shoulder.

A long time he held it there, the muzzle constantly moving, as though following the object at which it was aimed; then came the puff of smoke followed by the sharp report.

The horseman pressed forward now, for he saw his comrade disappear over the summit of the ridge, as though in haste to get the game he had brought down.

Arriving at the ridge, the horseman beheld a scene that caused his pale face to turn to the hue of death.

What he saw was a young girl standing upon the brink of a narrow canyon which split the ridge below in twain, and through which dashed a foaming torrent speeding on to the river at the base of the hills.

Her horse stood near her, his head drooped and his body trembling. Lariat Dick was hastening toward the young girl with long strides.

"My God! it is my child! my Ruth! Could he have fired upon her? No! no! no!" and with the words the horseman, gaining renewed strength from excitement, followed Lariat Dick to the spot where the young girl stood, still peering into the foaming canyon below.

"Bravo for you, miss! but that was the gamest leap I ever saw made in my life, and I am no slouch as a rider, myself."

"I wish to shake hands with one who has got the grit to ride a horse over that slit, and you can see the animal is nearly scared to death," and Lariat Dick held out his hand to the girl, who said with a grim smile:

"As I am, sir; but you fired that shot?"

"Yes, miss."

"You do not know from what you have saved me."

"I only know that I saw you pushing for all you could, and the man was following you, hot! You took the leap, and he was game enough to follow, so I caught him in the air and I guess horse and rider are on the trail to the lava beds now, for that's an ugly place to fall into," and Lariat Dick coolly looked down the fifty feet of the chasm into the surging torrent that swept into the river a hundred yards away.

As he did so he was startled by two cries:

"Ruth!"

"Father!"

He turned to behold his comrade spring from his horse and infold the maiden in his arms.

"Now this is a game I can chip in," he muttered as he quickly turned to regard the canyon stream once more.

His glance took in the ridge upon which they stood, the chasm which the young girl had dared to leap, and below, beyond the river, a fertile valley where was visible a settler's cabin home and outbuilding, and half a hundred acres rudely fenced in and under cultivation.

There were some hundreds of cattle feeding in the valley, a drove of sheep and a score of horses, showing that the settler was well to do.

A glance too had shown Lariat Dick that the young girl he had rescued was about eighteen, with a willowy, handsome figure and a face most attractive.

She was dressed in a homespun riding habit and wore a broad-brimmed slouch-hat, while a belt about her waist had a holster in which there was no revolver.

Her hair, a dark brown, was worn in long braids down her back, and altogether she was a handsome, dashing border girl.

"He said his home could be seen from the ridge, so I guess that's his daughter, and if so, I'm too glad," muttered Lariat Dick, just as his comrade came toward him.

"Lariat Dick, you have just done more for me than you did when you saved my own life, for this is my daughter Ruth, and she tells me that the one you shot was our bitterest foe, and he sought to kidnap her."

"Ruth, this is Lariat Dick, as I only know him, a young miner of Colorado, to whom I owe my life and yours."

"He was coming with me to our home, for I have not been well of late, and would not let me come alone."

Ruth again grasped the hand of the young miner, in whom she saw a tall, fine-looking, bronzed-faced man of thirty.

He had a look of marked intelligence, while his eyes had a reckless flash in them which perhaps had been the cause of much trouble to him.

Altogether he was one to seek for as a friend, to shun as a foe.

He was dressed as a miner, but with neatness, and there was about him an air that was very winning.

He blushed at Ruth's kind words, and asked bluntly:

"Who was the villain, miss?"

"A man whom in the long-ago my father befriended as he would a brother, and who cruelly wounded him in return."

"He holds some secret of father's which he sought to sell to me on certain terms, for he came to my home this morning."

"I defied him, and he said he would send my father to the gallows, and unless I became his wife he would do so."

"I drove him from the house with my revolver, and when I rode up in the hills two hours ago, hoping to meet my father, who has been gone far longer than he expected, I met this man again, and dashing upon me he struck my revolver from my hand and said he would take me with him and bring him to terms."

"I wheeled my horse and fled, in my despair taking the wrong way, and so had to take that fearful leap or be captured by him."

"You saved me, sir."

Lariat Dick had listened attentively to the girl's story, and then asked:

"What was his name?"

"We knew him long ago as Hammond Hughes, but his close resemblance to my father caused him to take his name, Trent Baxter, and under it he committed forgery and other crimes."

"His close resemblance to your father, miss?"

"Yes, I remarked it as I tried to cover his head with my rifle, for they are indeed strikingly alike."

"I am so glad I doubted, Pard Baxter, for those Vigilantes did indeed hang the wrong man; the right one is at the bottom of that river," said Lariat Dick, impressively.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE UNKNOWN NAME.

THE home of Trent Baxter the settler, had an air of comfort about it which Lariat Dick had not seen for many a long day.

Ruth saw a wistful look come into his eyes as he gazed about him, like one who was reminded of a past happy home, and he gave a sigh as he sat down and was left to himself by the settler and his daughter for a short while.

Ruth had her household duties to look to, especially as she had an honored guest, and the settler wished to lie down and rest awhile before supper, he said.

There was a pretty lawn to the house, some domestic flowers, and wild ones too which Ruth had begun to cultivate, and a neat fence surrounded the cabin, which had four rooms, divided by a wide hallway.

The latter was used in pleasant weather as a sitting-room and dining-room, while the ends were closed up in winter.

A piazza surrounded the house, and in the rear connected to it were two rooms, one a kitchen, the other a store and general utility room.

Beyond were a couple of cabins for servants' quarters, with a barn and sheds for the horses, cattle and sheep.

The view down the valley was a grand one, with the high range of rugged hills and the river to the right, the meadow lands and a distant range to left.

It was an ideal settler's home, and Lariat Dick could not but wonder how men could so mistake as to accuse Trent Baxter of being the outlaw chief known as Blue Jacket Bill, and hang him up as such.

"It was a close call, and but for my doubts he would be dead and this poor girl an orphan—yes, more, for that fellow would have kidnapped her."



"I verily believe that he is the very man they mistook Pard Baxter for!"

Trent Baxter had told Lariat Dick that he was a Southerner, and the young miner now saw about the place half a dozen negro servants.

Two of them were in the saddle, acting as cowboys, or herders, and they had greeted the settler as he came home with an earnestness that showed they were fond of him.

Two other men, negroes, were working about the place, and several negresses were seen, with some children playing in the back yard, which added to the home-like look of the place.

So it was that Lariat Dick sighed when bygone memories of his boyhood's home flooded upon him.

An hour after their arrival supper was announced, and Ruth appeared in a neat, well-fitting homespun dress, while the settler was greatly refreshed by his nap.

Lariat Dick had "freshened himself up" in the room given him, and the trio were quite cheerful as they sat down in the open hall to supper, just as the sun cast slanting rays from over the ridge.

And such a supper the miner had not beheld in many a long month, and said frankly that he could hardly realize that he was upon the frontier, in a sparsely settled country, for Mr. Baxter's nearest neighbor was half a dozen miles away.

There was a moon a week old, and the three sat out upon the piazza after supper, enjoying the beauty of the night, the settler puffing away at his pipe as he reclined in his easy-chair.

At last he said:

"Lariat Dick, I have only hinted to my daughter that I got into trouble up in Colorado, and I wish you would tell her just how it all happened."

"Better not talk over anything so unpleasant, Pard Baxter."

"Yes, but I wish to know all, Lariat Dick, for so I must call you, as you have not yet given me your other name," said Ruth, with an exceedingly broad hint that she would be glad to know.

But she was disappointed, for the miner replied, in his frank way:

"The boys call me Lariat Dick, Miss Baxter, so that name is good enough, and I rather like it."

Ruth was disappointed, as was also the settler, for thus far the miner had not given him his real name, and there must be some dread reason for his hiding it.

"My father went up into Colorado," continued Ruth, slightly piqued by the miner's refusal to give his name, "to look after some interests he once held there, in partnership with a miner, who told him that he possessed a very rich mine."

"Father helped him out of much trouble by buying a half interest with him, and as he has never heard more than that the property was expected to pay largely, and that was two years ago, he went to have a look at it."

"Did you find your partner, sir?" asked Lariat Dick.

"No; for I got into trouble before I was able to do so."

"Who was your partner, may I ask?"

"A man by the name of Ben Bostwick."

"I have heard the name somewhere," said Lariat Dick, and Ruth resumed:

"I did not wish father to go, for I have had little faith in the value of his investment, and that which we have here is paying him a good income."

"I really had a dread of evil befalling him."

"Tell her, Lariat Dick, that her presentiment was a correct one," said the settler.

"Well, miss, I met your father in obeying the Vigilantes' call to turn out and hunt down Blue Jacket Bill, a noted outlaw chief of New Mexico, who found his old camping-ground too hot for him, and disbanding his men came to Colorado and took the trails alone on horseback."

"I learned that he had been dogged to Colorado by a scout from Fort Blanco in New Mexico, who was known as the Revolver Sharp, and that he put the Vigilantes on the track of the outlaw chief."

"I obeyed orders, and when, with several other miners we joined the Regulators they had already a prisoner who they said was the noted Blue Jacket Bill, and that man was Pard Baxter here."

"My father!" cried Ruth with indignant anger, springing to her feet, fairly startling the young miner with her vehemence.

## CHAPTER IV.

### LARIAT DICK'S STORY.

"My child, do not get angry, for mistakes often occur you know," said the settler mildly.

"Yes, but for you to be mistaken for an outlaw is a mistake I can never forgive," was the reply.

"Many an innocent man has been hanged by process of law, miss, while on the border here mistakes seldom are made and we generally get the right one."

"But your father's resemblance to the man in question, this outlaw, Blue Jacket Bill, was what caused the trouble."

"Now you said your enemy of yesterday was strangely like your father."

"It is true, for they are of the same size, tall and well formed, only father is a few years older, I judge."

"Then he has beard and hair like my father's, and even their voices are alike."

"Well, he was doubtless the man whom the Scout Redfern tracked from New Mexico, and giving the note of alarm that Blue Jacket Bill was in the Colorado mines, and describing him, some of the Regulators met your father on the trail, covered him with their guns and ordered him to surrender."

"He did so naturally, and he was asked his name."

"He gave it, and that very name, Trent Baxter, Redfern the Revolver Sharp had said was the name by which Blue Jacket Bill was sometimes known."

"So, as I said, when my party of searchers came up with the main band, they had your father a prisoner, charged with being Trent Baxter alias Blue Jacket Bill."

"There was a border trial, and yet a few of us doubted, for I felt that your father seemed strangely honest-faced for a man whose crimes had been so terrible as those of which the New Mexican outlaw was accused."

"We spoke in his favor, and at last it was decided to send for Redfern the Scout, who was known to be at a place a dozen miles away."

"And he came?"

"Yes, miss, and he looked with a quick glance into your father's face and said that he was the outlaw."

"Infamous!"

"Your father urged against it, and to be certain the youth—"

"Youth?"

"Yes, miss, for Redfern is scarcely over eighteen."

"And a scout?"

"A noted one, miss."

"You called him also by another name?"

"He is known as the Revolver Sharp, miss, for he is the handiest man with his guns on the frontier, it is said, while as a gambler they say he plays only to win."

"A strange person, indeed!" and there was a sneer in Ruth's tone.

But unnoticed this, Lariat Dick replied:

"Ah, yes; he's a dandy, miss, and handsome enough for a girl."

"In fact, but for his splendid form and great strength, one would think he was a woman, he is so dove-eyed and gentle."

"But he's got more nerve than half a dozen ordinary men, and dresses as gorgeous as a Don, while his rig is velvet and silk, Mexican pure top to toe, with a scarlet sombrero embroidered with gold thrown in, not to speak of a saddle, bridle, and spurs worth a mint of money."

"His revolvers and knife are gold mounted too, and so they call him the Gold Revolver Sharp."

"What has he ever done to deserve one word of praise?" asked Ruth.

"Well, he wears a mighty long string of Indian scalps, miss."

"And he said that my father was this crime-stained man known as Blue Jacket Bill?"

"Yes, miss, he took a second look and a long one, and then told us we had the right man."

"Then the Regulators, unheeding your father's protestations of innocence, strung him up and the Red Sombrero rode away."

"Oh how terrible! but who rode away?" cried Ruth.

"The Revolver Sharp, miss, for he is also called Scarlet Sombrero."

"And these murderers who called themselves Regulators?"

"I was one of them, miss, I am sorry to say; but we rode off, leaving your father hanging there."

"Oh Heaven, have mercy!" gasped Ruth.

"But I still had my doubts, and so I took the back track alone, cut your father down, found

there was life in him and brought him to after a hard rub of it. That's the story, miss."

"Except, Ruth, that he carried me to his cabin, I riding his horse, he walking, and cared for me as tenderly as a woman could have done, until I felt that I must come home."

"He refused to let me go alone, so came with me, and thank God that he did, for you owe to Lariat Dick's coming your life as well, my child."

"God bless you, sir," and rising Ruth placed her hand upon the arm of the young miner, who responded:

"I might as well tell you, miss, that there is a grave at the tree, which the Regulators will think Blue Jacket Bill is in, so that your father will hardly be in any more danger of being taken for him, while it's my opinion the one who didn't quite make the leap you did across the canyon, will never trouble you more."

"No, that man is dead, I am certain," said the settler earnestly, while Ruth mused aloud:

"That Redfern the Scout made a fearful mistake, and he has my undying hatred for his ruthless act."

## CHAPTER V.

### A CLOSE CALL.

THERE was really a striking resemblance between Settler Trent Baxter, and the man who had been in pursuit of Ruth, when his chase terminated so suddenly and unexpectedly.

They had the same long waving hair and beard, the same form, and were really alike in feature, voice and bearing.

The man was well mounted, and his desire to capture Ruth must have been very great to have him risk the fearful leap.

He was appalled at seeing her take the risk, and a cry of admiration broke from his lips at her successful spring over the chasm.

He was not one to back down from a peril a woman had conquered, and so he set his splendid horse on the run to make the bound, while she had reined in her horse in the terrible dread that he would not meet death in his daring effort to capture her.

But, though his horse shot up into the air and forward, he was never destined to reach the other side, as the crack of Lariat Dick's rifle upon the ridge sent a bullet into the brain of the animal, when it had been hastily aimed at the brain of the man.

Down went the horse like a stricken bird, while, with a mighty spring the rider caught with one hand upon an extending limb of a tree growing in the crevice of the cliff ten feet below the edge.

The branch bent wildly, the tree cracked as the strain came upon its roots in the crevices, but it did not yield and the man drew himself up the trunk and sat there, his back against the wall, his face white, his whole form trembling with fright.

He sat thus for some minutes when he heard voices, but the wall of the canyon slanted under from the edge, thus hiding even the scrub tree growing on its side from one looking over the precipice.

There were a few minutes of terrible suspense, and then the voices died away and the man drew a long breath of relief.

He had seen his horse borne away upon the current, to dash to pieces upon the rocks where the stream tumbled over a fall into the river.

"It was the closest call of my life," he muttered with quivering voice.

But though safe for the present he knew that he was not yet rescued from peril.

Beneath him, fifty feet, surged the torrent, and upon all sides was a wall of rock.

The tree that was his only support and hope was hardly eight feet in height, a dwarf oak, with a thick trunk and short branches.

Above him ten feet was the top of the wall of rock, but it shelved outward above him, and not even a bird could find footing there.

As the situation was faced it grew more and more desperate, and the cold sweat broke out upon the man's face as he felt that he had escaped death with his horse but to die later by a fall from the tree.

He knew that no mortal being could live in that wild torrent, or go over the fall alive.

Still he began to consider that it was his only chance, and until night he sat there considering the course he would pursue after he had dropped into the stream on the morrow, for he would attempt nothing that night.

In making himself as comfortable as possible for the night, he suddenly discovered that he had his lariat coiled about him.

He had taken it from his saddle-horn to bind



Ruth Baxter with, when he made her his prisoner.

He quickly uncoiled it and made himself fast on the trunk of the tree.

The wisdom of this act he recognized as soon as he found himself dropping off to sleep, for he awoke with a cry and a spring, feeling himself falling, or dreaming that he was.

But for the lariat he would have dashed down to death in the dense darkness of the canyon below.

So the night passed away, and a dozen times did the lariat save the man from death.

At last the dawn came, and he began to look about him for means of escape.

He pulled some pieces of rock from the crevices, tied them to the end of his lariat and threw them across the canyon with a jerk, hoping to catch upon the limb of a scrub pine growing there.

Again and again he threw the rock and drew it back uncaught.

His arm was tired, and without food now, or water, for twenty-four hours, the strain upon him began to tell, strong as he was.

Making another desperate effort he threw a rock and it went over the limb with a whirl, turning twice before it came to a stop.

He could hardly restrain himself from a shout of joy at his success; but, he did so, knowing his danger if found there.

But would the end of the line hold?

He drew upon it and it did so.

Harder and harder he drew, until he was sure that it would bear his weight, and the snapping of a root of the tree warned him that the tree was also feeling the strain upon it.

He saw that he yet had a danger to face, for he had to swing from his perch, holding on to the lariat, and be careful to catch himself against the opposite wall, fifteen feet away so as not to be stunned by the shock.

He tied the lariat about him, and stood upon the trunk of the tree which began to sag badly, and he knew would not stand his weight much longer.

He saw that he would have a climb of some twelve feet up the lariat, and if it held him, there was hope for him, but if the end on the tree slipped, his doom was certain.

Nerving himself for the dread ordeal, he slipped down on the tree as far as he dared go, until the lariat was drawn taut, and then with hands and feet ready to break the shock of the dash against the other wall, he swung clear, and not a moment too soon, as another snapping root admonished him.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LARIAT-THROWER.

WITH a shock, quite severe, the daring man came against the opposite wall of the canyon.

Had he not been fast to the lariat, he would have been forced to let go, and dash downward; but, he withstood the blow, and then his heart seemed to cease beating, as he waited to see if the lariat would come loose.

It held firm, though his weight stretched it as tense as a guitar string.

Without delay he nerved himself for the upward climb.

But his strength began to fail him, and he found he could not reach the top, so he quickly looped the lariat about him, and after a long rest, again began to climb and got within a foot of the edge of the precipice.

Another loop he took about him with the trusty lariat, and then rested even longer than before.

Again he began the ascent. His hand clutched the edge of the rock; one elbow was upon it, and there he hung, unable to go further, so exhausted was he by the terrible nerve strain.

For a minute or more he rested; then reaching far forward on the lithe rope, with a mighty effort he drew himself to safety.

But, his feet yet were over the escarpment, and he could then not have moved an inch further if his life had depended upon it.

He became dazed, and sunk into the insensibility of prostration.

When he recovered consciousness, he still reposed in the same position, and the sun on the Western horizon told him that he had been there suspended for hours!

But he was safe at last—upon the firm land—and rising to his feet he approached the tree, on the limb of which his lariat had caught.

Then he saw how frail had been its hold, for the rock had turned twice around the limb and then had been drawn upward until it caught under the lariat, where his weight had drawn it tight.

A slackening of the lariat for a second would

have been the cause of his being dashed to death!

Hungry as a wolf, he knew he could get no food there; but water he could find, so he uncoiled his lariat and hastened away through the timber on the ridge until he came to a small stream running from a spring.

Eagerly he drank the cool water, and as it was twilight looked about for a place where he could pass the night, for at dawn he must be on his way to find food; and more—to seek safety, for he well realized that he was in a dangerous neighborhood.

He found a spot up among the rocks, sheltered by dwarf pines, and scraping together the dead needles, he lay down to rest and was soon fast asleep.

It was just after dawn when he awoke, greatly refreshed by his sleep, but very hungry, and he sat down to consider just what he was to do.

He was afoot, with his revolvers it was true, though his rifle had gone down with his horse, as had also his ammunition, and other traps which he had with him.

Yet he dared not shoot any game then, as some one might be near, and the home of Settler Baxter was not beyond hearing.

No; he must plunge into the woodlands and kill some game to get food.

Having decided upon what he would do, he rose to his feet.

But suddenly he stooped down with a slight ejaculation.

There, coming along a trail which must bring him within a rod of the pile of rocks where he was, he beheld a horseman.

He was well mounted, well armed, and came along at an easy gait, unsuspecting harm.

Quick as a flash the man had made one end of his lariat fast to a pine, coiled the loop end and stood ready to throw it.

On came the horseman, his horse not even scenting danger, and as he passed the spot where the other lay in ambush, the coil was thrown and settled down over the head of the rider.

It was a splendid throw and the frightened horse with a spring forward dragged his rider from the saddle, with a fall so heavy that he lay stunned and bleeding upon the ground.

The horse, as the one in ambush had seen, went to the end of his lariat, the other end being hooked in the belt of the horseman.

Quickly sprung the lariat-thrower from his ambush, and dashing down the rocks he bent over the prostrate form of his victim.

"I guess his neck's broken, so I have nothing to fear from him."

"I'll see what he has of value about him, and his rifle and revolvers will come in well—Ha! there hangs a haversack of food to his saddle-horn."

So saying the man quickly rifled his victim's pockets, took his revolvers from his belt, and his rifle from the saddle-horn and swung it on his back.

Then he mounted the horse, and as he rode away dove deep into the haversack of food, which was well filled with edibles sufficient to last several days, a canteen of liquor being also stowed away in it.

"I am in luck."

"My patron saint has not deserted me," he said grimly as he rode along at a sweeping gallop.

And there in the trail for over an hour lay his victim, bleeding from a cut in the head and unconscious.

But the flow of blood at last revived him and he sat up and looked curiously about him.

His neck felt sore and he placed his hand upon it, and then felt the cut in his head.

"I was caught with a lariat and jerked heavily from my saddle."

"Ah! I have been robbed of my weapons, my money, my horse and all."

"Who was the robber?"

"Whoever he is, he is gone, and I must take his trail as soon as I can get back to Settler Baxter's and—but how dizzy I feel," and pressing his hand to his head he went staggering along upon the trail.

Two hours after Lariat Dick tottered up to the settler's home and fell like one dead upon the piazza steps.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A SHEEP AMONG WOLVES.

THE scene changes to a mining-camp in New Mexico, which rejoiced most appropriately in the name of Devil's Ranch City.

It was not a ranch in the acceptance of the

term, unless the herding together there of human beings like cattle could suggest the idea.

It was not a city in any acceptance of the word, for it was but a series of cabin hamlets, where miners dwelt, and was really but a group of camps stretched out in a valley which ran through a mining country.

But as the home of devils it was a success, for seven out of every ten men there were of a desperado turn of mind, and a fugitive from justice.

Saloons were frequent, and gambling dens, where all kinds of games of chance were played, were upon every hand.

There were targets for rifle and revolver practice, a race-track half a mile long, and various other means of amusement and for losing one's cash in betting.

The most important structure in the place, and this was imposing only in being in Devil's Ranch, was the "New Mexico Hotel."

Its "boss," as his name read on the sign, was one by the name of Senor Du Val, whom most every one believed to be a Mexican, for he spoke with a slight foreign accent.

But Senor Du Val was an American pure and simple, and played the "Mexican dodge" for reasons he found convenient.

He did not look unlike a Mexican, dressed in the style of the country, and wore moccasins, a fact that allowed him to be present when his servants least expected it.

He was a good landlord, and kept hunters and caterers out constantly for his hotel, where a good table was always to be found.

He had the reputation of not being afraid of even the patron of the camps, Satan, and could take care of himself and manage his hotel without advice from any one.

The stage-coach eastward had its terminus at Devil's Ranch, and was wont to run out once a week and arrive as often, and the going and coming thereof was an event for the miners.

Few of them got letters, or wrote them, and some of those who did used names not put down at their baptism as their own.

It was safer for many of them not to keep up a correspondence.

Still there was a mail to and from Devil's Ranch semi-weekly, and some of the miners received letters from home, and wrote back of their success or failure in making a fortune for their loved ones.

There were a precious lot of desperadoes in the camp ever ready for a fracas, and often they found some one to oblige them, and the result was that the graveyard of Devils' Ranch grew apace in numbers with the city.

And into such a town one Sunday afternoon came an itinerant parson.

He came walking along, a knapsack on his back, on which was painted a white cross, and a staff like a shepherd's crook in one hand, a gun across his shoulder held by the other.

It was a double-barrel gun used for killing game, rather than warring enemies.

His face was clean-shaven, his hair cut close, as though he had just escaped from prison, and he wore a somber suit, top-boots and a plug hat.

He wore glasses with a slight bluish tint in them, and came along singing a hymn in a voice that was really rich and musical.

He either scented the supper at the New Mexico, or had received advice from some one as to the best place to go, for his steps were straight for Landlord Du Val's hotel.

Some of the "sinners" gave him a wide berth, a few followed him, joining in with his singing, and others jeered and shouted at him.

But he reached the New Mexico and his heart was gladdened by the welcome given him by Senor Du Val, who told him he had come to the right place for good living and to save souls.

He registered as Ebenezer Freeze, and began work at once.

His fine singing, pointed preaching, and universal good-humor, with his hammer-and-tongs way of going for a sinner, made him popular in Devil's Ranch, and the miners chipped in lively whenever he passed his hat to help along the good cause.

For some weeks had Parson Freeze been at Devil's Ranch, when one Sunday at noon a horseman rode up to the New Mexico and told the peon who took his horse to give him a good feed and every care.

He was a fine-looking man, ranging upon fifty, with a face that was full of character and such as only the possessor of a noble nature could wear.

He was greeted in a pleasant and respectful manner by landlord Du Val, who then went



with him to his store, for the landlord kept a store as well as a hotel, gambling hall, and drinking saloon.

"Well, Miner St. John, shall my clerk put you up your regular two week's supplies?" said Senor Du Val as he entered the store with the one whom he addressed as Miner St. John.

"Make it a month's supplies this time, please, as I shall hardly return before that time," was the answer.

The stores consisting of sugar, coffee, flour, meal, bacon, crackers, and other things were put up and placed in a large pair of canvas saddle-bags, after which the miner paid for them and went in with the landlord to dinner, and a good dinner it was too.

"Is your mine panning out well, Miner St. John?" asked the landlord.

"Yes, better by far than I anticipated."

"That is good: but you must keep a very close watch then, for you have no neighbor within many miles, and there are plenty of men who might kill you."

"I have no enemy that I know of—at least here," he added after some hesitation.

"It would make no difference to many whether you were an enemy or not, so they got your gold."

"Be careful, I beg of you, for Redfern, our mutual friend, bade me keep an eye to your safety."

"He is very kind, and a noble fellow."

"Yes, he is indeed."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"He went down into Mexico, after he resigned his place as scout at Fort Blanco, and I believe has gone to visit that mysterious Veiled Lady who visited us here at one time, and but for Redfern would have taken the life of Trent Baxter the Sharp from Texas."

"Yes, I heard of the affair; but that youth is a mystery to me, Landlord Du Val."

"As he is to all of us, miner; but you are not going?"

"Yes, I have a very long ride, as you know, and then I have a desire to see and talk with Parson Freeze."

"Ah! not going to let him convert you are you?"

"No, but I have a desire to see and talk with him, so can you tell me where I can find him?"

"Out on the piazza I guess."

The miner did find the parson there, and in shaking hands with him left a slip of paper in his palm.

Then he went to the stable, mounted his horse and rode away.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PARSON AND HIS PARD.

PARSON FREEZE had greeted the miner like one unknown to him.

He had spoken of his pleasure in meeting a "stranger and a brother," and asked him to remain to evening service, when he was going to run opposition to gambling and carousing by a sermon.

But Miner St. John said that he only desired to meet the parson, of whom the miners spoke so highly, and telling him that he had a long ride before him so could not remain for the sermon had ridden away.

As soon as he could do so, after the miner's departure, Parson Freeze slipped away to himself and read the slip of paper left in his hand:

It was as follows:

"I must see you to-day.

"Follow me and I will await you in Rocky Glen.

"As it is Sunday all the miners are in their camps so no one will see our meeting.

"Don't fail me.

"ST. JOHN."

The parson frowned, but somehow he did not seem to wish to disobey the demand, and going out to the stable he got a horse belonging to Senor Du Val and rode away.

After he left what was known as "Social Avenue" in the town, he turned upon a trail which would lead him into the one which the miner had taken.

The camps straggled along for a couple of miles from the New Mexico, and the miners who were "at home," greeted him as he rode by.

One asked:

"Who's turned up his toes, parson?"

Another inquired:

"Has ther' been a row, parson, and somebody kilt?"

"Yer hain't a-goin' ter see some one who hev died a natural death, be yer, Bible Pard?"

To all queries the parson had his answer, and

after leaving the last cabin he quickened his pace, and a mile further on beheld Miner St. John awaiting him.

As the miner saw him coming he turned out of the trail into a rocky glen, and after riding a couple of hundred yards halted.

"Well, Pard St. John, here I am.

"Nothing important, I hope," said the parson, dismounting as the miner had done.

"Yes, Pard Baxter, I think so."

"Well, out with it, for I do not like suspense."

"You may not like what I have to say, my friend, but I deem it my duty."

"I will listen, pard."

"You know that ever since you kept that Mexican, Juan the Fox, from killing me I have been your firm friend."

"I well know that, pard."

"I told you that half my earnings were yours, that my cabin was your home, and you became as it were my partner."

"Then followed your arrest by Redfern as Blue Jacket Bill, and your escape from being shot when it was proven the young scout was mistaken, and that Juan the Fox had informed him, accusing you from revenge."

"You disappeared for some time and came back in the guise you are now in."

"Did I not know all this as well as you, Pard St. John?"

"Yes, but I recall it to show that when Redfern the Scout returned from Colorado and reported seeing you hanged there, I mourned you sincerely."

"Then you appear in your present disguise, proving that Redfern had seen the wrong man hanged, and you told me that you had come back to help me work in the mine, after you had tried to run down the Blue Jacket band of outlaws by going to Devil's Ranch and finding out who they were."

"And so I am, pard."

"True; but do you consider it right for you to appear in false colors, preaching the Gospel as you do, under pretense of being a minister, praying as you do, where as a gambler known as the Sharp from Texas you have taken the lives of your fellow beings?"

"Is not this blasphemy, friend Baxter, and is it not right that I should tell you, as a Christian man myself, it must cease?"

"Must?"

"Yes, so I said, and so I mean."

"I have believed your stories against all proofs seemingly brought by others against you, and I alone know that you are not now what you pretend to be, a preacher of the Gospel."

"Your old comrades, even that keen-eyed landlord of the New Mexico, do not recognize you with your clean-shaven face, your long hair cut close, your spectacles and general disguise."

"Well, to what does all this tend, miner?"

"To urge you to stop your sacrilege, to come here and work with me, and when I have done all I anticipate, go from here with me and lead a different life, for I am rich enough for us both, thanks to my valuable mine."

"I am not ready to go yet."

"Then you must stop this false life you lead as a preacher."

"You know that I have to remain in hiding until I can prove that I am not the man they accuse me of being."

"Colonel Rockwood at Fort Blanco would place that young Revolver Sharp and his soldiers at once upon my trail, did they know I was back here again, and as this disguise is beyond all recognition I shall stick to it, for I am anxious to find the real criminal to prove my innocence, and I do not see how you are interested in me to the extent of wishing to have me do what is against my judgment."

"Well, Baxter, I am no hypocrite, but I respect my religion, and you are making a mockery of it."

"I have told you what I wish, and unless you give up your false preaching and praying, I will, on my next visit to Devil's Ranch, make known to Landlord Du Val that you are not what you represent yourself to be."

"Be warned and do as I beg you, pard."

"All right, old fellow, give me a week and I will, for, no matter what the instrument, I have done some good among the miners."

"In one week's time you will come back to the cabin then, Baxter, and work with me to the end I have in view?"

"Here is my hand on it, pard."

"Expect me."

"Now I must return, for," and he laughed lightly, you know I have an appointment to preach to-night."

Thus they parted, the one trusting and hoping, the other muttering:

"Yes, in one week's time, for he will do what he says, and I must act."

"It is time now, and delays are dangerous."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SHOT FROM THE DARKNESS.

MORE than the week passed by, and Trent Baxter, alias Parson Freeze, as the reader now knows him, did not appear at the cabin in Yellow Canyon, where had dwelt Gray St. John for a long while, digging the earth for the precious metal known as gold.

The miner went on with his work steadily, however, for he had the hope of soon turning his mine over to another to work for him, while he sought those he loved, and for whom he had toiled so long and earnestly.

His thoughts went back to his youthful days, when a rival for the hand of the girl he loved, forced him to fight a duel with him, in her presence, and left him nearly dying, while he fled, believing he had given him a fatal wound.

He married the sweet young girl afterward, and their sweet daughter, Ethel, was now with her brother in Maryland, longing for his return.

He had left them in poverty, and for a while fortune had been against him; but at last he "struck it rich," and since then he had steadily grown rich.

And saving him, as he believed, from the bullet of an assassin, Trent Baxter had become his friend, been made his partner.

That friend he had been told was secretly Blue Jacket Bill, the leader of a band of road-agents, and he had also been told that he had been hanged in Colorado.

But back he came, disguised as a preacher, and he had believed him as of yore an honest man.

But he would not tolerate in him his blasphemy, his mockery of the Gospel, and had gone and told him so frankly.

Now as he sat in his cabin this Sabbath night, the thoughts of Gray St. John took a gloomy turn.

He had heard of the man with whom he had fought a duel in his boyhood having been lost at sea; but somehow the presentiment would force itself upon him that Hugh Hammond, for such was his name, would some day take his life.

He dreamed at night of death-struggles with his old foe, and the dread of such an end gave him the deepest concern.

It was the custom of Miner St. John never to work in his mine on the Sabbath Day.

He was wont to dress up in his best and spend the day in writing home, or in going to the store at Devil's Ranch for stores, for there was no Sunday in that place.

He had written his letter on that day, and was seated in deep thought in his cabin, his mind full of that same old fear that his boyhood rival would one day hunt him to his death.

His horse was cropping grass in the canyon below the cabin, the falling of a rivulet over the rocks near made pleasant music, and Miner St. John did not feel the near presence of danger.

Had he felt a peril near, he would have been prepared for it, for he was a fearless man.

But he did not know that a horseman rode up to the barrier across the canyon, dismounted, hitched his horse, and scaling the fence walked in toward the cabin.

As though knowing the land well, he crept near the canyon's side, keeping in the shadow.

The miner's faithful horse feeding near seemed to know the intruder, for he gave no warning neigh, as he would have done had a stranger appeared in the darkness of the night.

Up the steep trail to the cabin, perched upon the rocks in a grove of pines, moved the form.

He saw the light shining from the open door, and from a position near beheld Miner Gray St. John, seated in his rustic easy-chair, lost in thought.

The lamp burned upon the table near, sending a radiance over the form of the miner, and for some time the intruder stood regarding him.

Then he slowly raised a rifle to his shoulder and his eye ran along the sights.

Was no guardian angel near to warn the miner of his danger?

It seemed not, for he sat perfectly motionless, his head resting upon one hand.

But he was not asleep.

For some reason the rifle was lowered, and the man hesitated.

Again he raised the weapon, and the motive which caused him to once more lower it, who can tell?

Was it a pricking of conscience?

No one knows; but a third time the rifle was raised.

This time the intended assassin seemed to have



made up his mind to act, for he placed himself well, took a long aim, and his finger touched the trigger.

There was a red flash from the muzzle of the rifle, a sharp report, and Miner St. John sprang to his feet.

He stood upright one moment, his hands outstretched as though toward some one, and then, without a word, sunk back dead in his chair.

The man who had fired the shot did not move from his position.

He saw his victim rise, that silent, pleading, stretching forth of the hands, and something very like a groan came from his lips.

Then he saw the form sink back, and he knew that Gray St. John was dead.

Yet still he did not move, still he did not advance toward the motionless form.

He seemed to lack the strength to move, and resting his hands upon the muzzle of his rifle, stood gazing like one entranced upon the motionless form.

At last a sigh broke from his lips, followed almost immediately after by the hoarsely uttered words:

"Fool! it was his destiny to die thus, mine to kill him!"

"I would not be weak, but strong, for much, oh, so much, depends upon it!"

With this the assassin strode boldly into the cabin, closed the door behind him, and was alone with the dead.

#### CHAPTER X.

##### THE BLUE JACKETS.

SINCE the rumored hanging of their chief the Blue Jacket Band of outlaws had been very quiet.

They were a bold, bad lot of road-agents who had done much damage under the leadership of a mysterious chief known as Blue Jacket Bill.

Whether the Blue Jackets, or the Comanches and Apaches were the greatest cause of dread to miners, and settlers, and of worry to soldiers, no one could decide.

Who Blue Jacket Bill was no one seemed to know, more than that he was a man of superb physique, dressed in black pants, long boots, and wore a bright blue jacket and a scarlet scarf about his waist.

His head was sheltered by a black sombrero which had a visor which could be pulled down over his face, thus masking it completely.

Splendidly mounted and armed, and a daring fellow, he had been for a long while a lone road-agent.

Then, when a party of soldiers sought to capture him, half a dozen other Blue Jackets appeared upon the scene and Uncle Sam's Boys in Blue had been beaten off.

Robberies of stage-coaches, trains and settlements followed, with an occasional dash upon the mines, until Blue Jacket Bill became terribly feared along the border trails, and all efforts to capture him or his men, seemed utterly useless.

If one of his men was wounded in a fight, every other Blue Jacket at once gave him a shot and ended his life then and there, for they were determined to have it a case of "dead men tell no tales."

But at last came several hard blows upon the Blue Jackets, hit by one Redfern, a boy scout from Fort Blanco.

Next was heard the startling news that a noted gambler of Devil's Ranch, but one who was much admired and always considered a square man, had been arrested by Redfern as Blue Jacket Bill.

He denied it *in toto*, but he was carried by his captor to the fort, where soon after a man appeared claiming that he was Blue Jacket Bill, and he would not see another hanged on his account.

Of course that set the Sharp from Texas free, and next came a party of alleged Texan rancheros to the fort, one of them, an old man, claiming that the self-accused Blue Jacket Bill was his son, and an escaped lunatic.

Of course this set him free; but Redfern still stuck to his belief that the Sharp from Texas was really the right man, and tracking him to Colorado he at once run down and saw hanged one whom he declared was Blue Jacket Bill.

That he was mistaken the reader has seen.

But Redfern returned to the fort, and from thence to Devil's Ranch, and the result of his work there was the death of El Paso Pete, and the capture of several men who were discovered to be beyond all cavil members of the Blue Jacket Band.

The proofs were against them, and taken to Fort Blanco they met with just punishment for their crimes.

Redfern, the Revolver Sharp, had gone to Mexico, and since then the Blue Jackets had not been heard from upon the trails.

But the Blue Jackets were not utterly wiped out, though frightened into keeping quiet.

They had heard of the hanging of their chief in Colorado, and yet had received secret information from him since his alleged tragic end.

Only lately they had received secret notification to meet at the old rendezvous in the mountains, and just six men put in an appearance there, all that was left of the band.

These six were masked, and they wore their costume which had given them the name of Blue Jacket outlaws.

The place of rendezvous was a crater-like place upon the top of a hill, and the approach to it was incapable of leaving a trail.

The men had assembled there one by one, and were grouped about talking over the occurrences since their last meeting together.

The gist of this conversation was that they all were of one opinion regarding their chief, and that was that he had as many lives as a cat is credited with.

Upon the way to the rendezvous was a seventh horseman.

He was mounted upon an animal that had the look of possessing great speed and bottom, and he was armed with three revolvers in his belt.

He rode like one accustomed to the saddle, and what his face was no one could tell, for it was completely masked.

He wore a blue jacket, embroidered in gold, a wide-brimmed, black sombrero encircled by gold cord, and had even his hands concealed under gauntlet gloves, so that whether he was pale-face, Indian or negro could not be ascertained by the eye.

He seemed to know the trail well to the hill-top, and rode in upon the group there before they were aware of his coming.

"Well men, I am glad to see that the Blue Jackets are not all wiped out, for there are several of us left yet," he said pleasantly, as the party quickly arose and saluted him as soldiers would their commander.

"Let me see whom we have left out of our band of thirteen."

"Answer to your numbers as I call the roll."

Then he began and slowly called the roll in numbers.

As he called out:

"Number one!" he answered himself:

"Present!"

Then came the other numbers up to thirteen, and just six failed to respond, the other six being present.

He took a slip of paper from his pocket upon which opposite each number was written a name and some description of the man, and the chief alone knew the secret as to who the Blue Jackets were.

Those six present had come alone, and being completely masked not one of them knew who his comrade was. Only by his more gorgeous uniform was the chief known to his men.

"Men, I called you together to tell you that there is work to be done, and to convince you that your chief, Blue Jacket Bill, was not dead."

"They may have hanged Trent Baxter the gambler, the Sharp from Texas, or some one else, but Blue Jacket Bill was not born to be hanged and he is, as you see, once more before you."

"One week from to-day Mexican Joe, the driver, carries eastward a good many pesos in gold dust, and I will show them that Blue Jacket Bill and his men are still alive by transferring the treasure to our keeping."

"At noon, at the Blue Jackets' Toll Gate, where we have so often taken toll, meet me without fail."

"You can go!"

The men again saluted, each man walked to his horse, mounted and rode away, not two of them going together.

When they had been gone some time Blue Jacket Bill, the chief, also mounted his horse and rode away, taking the trail back into the valley from whence he had come.

#### CHAPTER XI.

##### THE CHIEF WAS WELL POSTED.

MEXICAN JOE was a safe hand with the reins, knew the trails perfectly, drove a good team of horses and was as plucky as behooves a mortal man to be.

He was an American who was known as Mexican Joe because he had once driven stage in Mexico.

Some said that he had driven it more in his own interests than the company's, but he cer-

tainly was looked upon as a good man to have by the line that ran coaches out of Devil's Ranch eastward.

It was said that Mexican Joe was so cunning that he could run a coach through carrying thousands of dollars, which the sharpest-eyed road-agent could not find.

So one morning Mexican Joe drove out of Devil's Ranch wearing his accustomed smile of unconcern, and started upon his eastward run.

He had as passengers four miners, who were on their way home.

They had been reasonably good fellows, worked rather hard, and had added to their savings until they had laid up a handsome "nest egg" apiece in the hands of their wives, and were going back to enjoy the result of their labors.

Their last diggings they had kept to take with them in the natural ore, and each was proud of what he had to show.

It may be that this quartette would have remained longer in the mines, for they rather enjoyed the free life there, had not Parson Freeze crossed their paths.

One of them had been a convert at home, but became a backslider when temptation assailed him.

The "parson" quickly showed him the error of his ways, and he came back into the fold, while his influence brought in the other three.

From that day the "parson" became their best friend, and they gave up gambling and drinking for his sake, while they decided to go home together and lead different lives.

So they talked it all over with the "parson," set a day secretly when they would depart, and then plotted how they could carry along their separate treasures without losing them, should any of Blue Jacket Bill's band hold up the stage-coach on the way.

They hit upon a most clever plan, and with the aid of Mexican Joe it was carried out.

The night before their departure, the parson not being then in Devil's Ranch, they slightly "fell from grace."

That is, the unconverted among the miners made up a plot to get the "Prayer Sharps," as they called them, on a spree.

They gave them a royal send-off, and when the coach started at an early hour the next morning not one of the four had been to bed and they were bundled into the vehicle in a condition that they would not have had the parson see them in for half their hidden treasure.

They had been prevailed upon to take a parting glass, which was quickly multiplied by a dozen, or more.

So Mexican Joe drove off with his four passengers, all of them fast asleep, and he muttered to himself:

"I'd give a Comanche's sculp if the parson could be 'ere now."

So Mexican Joe sent the team along at a brisk pace, wholly unmindful of danger, for he, with others, considered that the Blue Jackets had been wiped out.

"Now there's a place I never feel easy about, if there are no Blue Jackets now," he said to himself as he approached a canyon pass known as the Blue Jackets' Toll-Gate."

Here had scores of robberies been committed by road-agents, and over under the shadow of the cliffs were a number of graves, of victims and outlaws alike.

Mexican Joe's fears had not been without cause, for as he drove into the narrow pass among the rocks, he suddenly saw a horseman ride out of the pines before him.

He gave a quick glance over his shoulder and beheld two horsemen close in behind him.

There was no mistaking the man in front.

It was Blue Jacket Bill or his ghost.

He sat quietly upon his horse, his revolver drawn, awaiting the coming of the coach, which was yet a hundred yards away from him.

The two Blue Jacket horsemen in the rear came on at a pace a trifle faster than that of the coach.

On either side now, from the rocks, appeared two dismounted men, and these were Blue Jackets also, and armed with rifles.

"I'll be darned," ejaculated Mexican Joe as he saw the trap into which he had driven.

He was a cool fellow, and again remarked:

"But they won't find the dust, though I do hope they give them drunken gerloots a scare as will sober 'em forever."

As he saw the chief of the Blue Jackets point significantly to his revolver with his left hand, Mexican Joe drew rein with the remark:

"Excuse me, pard. I were driving a little fast; but darn me ef I didn't think you was dead!"



"Do I look like a dead man, Mexican Joe?"  
 "Not much to speak of; but I heard you was hanged."  
 "It was a mistake."  
 "I'm sorry."  
 "What?"  
 "I says, I'm sorry, pard, that you wasn't hanged."  
 "You are complimentary."  
 "Don't mention it; but has you any biz with me, or my pilgrims this morning, Blue Jacket Bill?"  
 "Yes, I want their money, which you have so carefully hidden away," was the cool reply of the chief.

## CHAPTER XII.

## BETTER AND WISER ONES.

THE four miners had slept the sleep of the unjust, from their leaving the New Mexico at Devil's Ranch.

Their carcasses were full of rum, and their brains befuddled so that the ride and the scenery had no charm for them.

One of them awoke in a bewildered way when they were halted, and he glared out of the coach window.

Did he really see Blue Jacket, or was he dreaming?

The last words of Blue Jacket Bill quite recalled his scattered senses, and the vigorous blows and kicks he gave his comrades aroused them.

A fight would have followed had he not whispered the magic words:

"We are halted by Blue Jackets!"

They too awoke to the situation as they heard:

"I hain't carrying no treasure this run, pard."

"I know better!"

"Then yer ought ter do better!"

"Comel no nonsense with me, for I want that gold."

"I hain't got but a dozen dollars in my clothes!"

"It is not your money that I wish, but the dust that belongs to Dollar Dan, Ben Cape, Silas Moore and Benedict."

"Oh, Lord!" came in chorus from the four men in the coach as they heard themselves named.

"If they has got any dust, they was fools to bring it along," said Joe.

"They brought it all the same, and I want it."

"Pard, we has a leetle change in our pockets, that's all," said one of the miners from the coach window.

"Get out of there, all of you, and down flat upon your faces," came the order.

It was not obeyed, and Blue Jacket Bill sent a bullet through the coach, unmindful whether it hit any one or not.

The effect was electrical, for the coach doors flew open and out sprung the quartette.

They were very unsteady upon their pins and down they fell, but that was what the Blue Jackets meant they should do.

Then the chief rode forward, while his men kept the miners covered, and said with a sly smile:

"Been fitting up your old hearse, eh, Joe?"

"Well, I kinder pruned it up a leetle."

"Yes, and I admire your taste immensely."

"Got these trimmings on your last run East, I guess."

"Well, blue was always a favorite color of mine, you know."

"Here, Number Seven, tear this top lining from this coach!"

"My God!" groaned the miners, while Mexican Joe said:

"Waal, he are posted for a fact."

Blue Jacket Number Seven quickly cut away the trimming of the inside top of the coach, revealing a new ceiling.

"Ah! now get Joe's axe and knock that ceiling out!"

This was done, and bag after bag of dust dropped down in the coach.

"Clever, were you not, Joe?"

"But since I was hanged I have a better sight and know what is going on."

"See, here are some seven or eight thousand dollars in dust that you tried to run through without my finding."

As the chief spoke, he was placing the buckskin bags handed to him in a pair of saddle-bags across his horse, while Mexican Joe regarded the operation with simple wonder.

"How you got on to that racket, just beats me," growled Joe.

"You know a man that has been hanged can see anything, Pard Joe."

"I'm a spook now, so don't try and hide things from me."

"Waal, when Redfern the Revolver Sharp hears of this, I'll go big odds that he makes a spook of yer, Blue Jacket Bill."

"I'll take your bet, Joe, so name the amount," was the quick reply.

"You believe my word is good to pay?"

"Yes."

"Well, if the Sharp Revolver don't kill you, either by bullet or hanging within six months from this day, I'll fetch you a hundred dollars myself."

"Good! and if he does I'll say right here before my men that they are to pay you the same sum."

"That's mighty poor chance of getting it."

"Why?"

"They'll be hanged with you."

"Ah! that may be, so I'll make you sure."

"How can you?"

"This bag is worth about five hundred," and he held up a bag of gold-dust.

"Yes, maybe a trifle more."

"Well, take it to Du Val of the New Mexico and leave it with him until the time is up, when you can claim it from him."

"If I win, bring it back to me with your own five hundred."

"I'll do it, pard," and Mexican Joe caught the bag of gold tossed up to him.

Having put the balance into his saddle-bags the chief said:

"Now, pards, you can go on your way, and I am well aware that you have money where you are going, besides more in your belts, so you have not been robbed of your all."

"Get into the coach."

They obeyed, a sad, inflamed-eyed, bloated-face, nervous lot, and Mexican Joe drove on his way with a wave of his hand, and a cheerful:

"Ta-ta, Billie."

A sadder but wiser set of men the miners were after their adventure, and they swore "never to drink any more."

It is to be hoped that they kept their pledge after the bitter experience they had known.

Blue Jacket Bill watched the coach until it was out of sight, and then handed to each one of his men a bag of dust, while he said:

"You are dismissed for just three months from to-day, men, when you are to meet at the regular rendezvous."

"If you are needed sooner you will be notified by the secret signs upon your cabin door."

"Now you can go, and I congratulate you upon your work to-day."

"Remember, in three months, if not sooner notified."

The six Blue Jackets saluted and rode away, as before, going singly.

Soon after their departure the chief resumed aloud:

"If my plot goes well, this is the last of the Blue Jackets."

"If it fails, then I shall need gold, and these trails are the places for me to get it."

"Now to get well away before Mexican Joe reports this day's work at Fort Blanco," and Blue Jacket Bill rode off at a gallop.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE ALARM.

THE garrison at Fort Blanco had had a season of rest and peace for some time.

The alleged hanging of Blue Jacket Bill, and the real execution of several of the band had caused them to feel no longer dread that the trails would be infested with those merciless road agents.

Then, too, the Comanches had been whipped into submission for a while, and the Apaches were too closely watched to make a disturbance.

The disturbing elements in the mines had been held in check, it was said, by the good services of Parson Freeze, and fewer fracas had been had in Devil's Ranch than ever before known.

Colonel Rockwood, the dashing commandant of Fort Blanco began to feel that he would have little field service for his men, and almost regretted the stagnation of affairs.

His favorite scout, Redfern the Revolver Sharp, a youth who was a mystery to every one, had gone to Mexico upon affairs of his own, having resigned his position in the scouting corps under Buckskin Sam.

Before leaving, Redfern, who had been doing Secret Service scouting work for the commandant, had recommended Landlord Du Val of the New Mexico at Devil's Ranch, as a secret agent, while Manuel Moline, a special scout, had taken his, Redfern's, place at the fort.

While there was nothing of an exciting nature going on in the field, the officers and their families at Fort Blanco made up for it in enjoyments of various kinds.

There were hunts, fishing parties, rides, and dances at the fort, and thus time was not hanging heavily upon the hands of the garrison.

Then came a rumor that a murder had been committed in the mines, and Manuel Moline was sent to ferret it out.

He returned in a few days accompanied by Landlord Du Val who reported that a miner by the name of Gray St. John, who had one of the best paying leads in the mines, had been shot in his cabin, and after being robbed by the assassin had been buried.

He told what he knew of Miner St. John's history and said that he was a friend of Redfern, and had been the partner of Trent Baxter, whom he had taken in with him.

To find the murderer was impossible it seemed, and soon after Senor Du Val sent in the startling information that Parson Freeze, the preacher who had done so much good at Devil's Ranch, had mysteriously disappeared.

He had not left his room in the hotel with intention to stay away, for there were all his things, a Bible and some tracts, with a bag containing nearly fifty dollars in gold.

He had said he would return one evening when he had walked out, stating that he was going to visit a sick miner, and since that no one had seen him.

There were several sick miners in the camps, and as many more laid up with wounds and bruises received in rows, but none of them had received the consolation of a call from the parson upon the day of his mysterious disappearance.

It was hinted that he had made some enemies by his bold preaching, and a few who professed to know, stated that the contributions of the miners had been most generous, and the parson changed all gold into paper money, and was wont to carry it in a belt around his waist.

This led to the belief that he had been murdered by some one for his money, for there were men in Devil's Ranch, so said Landlord Du Val, who would kill an angel for his wings.

This disappearance of the parson, following so closely upon the murdered Miner St. John, created considerable excitement among the miners of the fort.

Hardly had this news cooled, when Mexican Joe drove his coach into the fort, and dismounting from his box, asked to see Colonel Rockwood.

He had four passengers, not one of whom looked happy, and from their conversation the soldiers judged that their looks did not belie them.

Colonel Rockwood's orderly at once led the driver to the presence of the commandant, and Mexican Joe said in his quaint way:

"Colonel, I has to report a resurrection, sir."

"I do not catch your meaning, Joe," the colonel said, with a smile.

"Well, sir, Blue Jacket Bill wants to be hanged ag'in."

"Ah! you have news."

"Yes, sir, at Blue Jacket Toll-Gate at noon to-day, my hearse was held up by three mounted and four dismounted Blue Jackets, and the leader was old Bill himself."

"Impossible, driver, for Redfern the Scout saw that man hanged in Colorado."

"Then he didn't wait to see him buried, sir, for that was Blue Jacket Bill that held me up."

"You are sure?"

"He has halted me, sir, something like sixty times in my runs, and I have been too near him for my own good, so I knows him for keeps."

"I hain't never seen his face, but his form and bearing I know mighty well, as also his voice; his horse, saddle, bridle and all, and it was Blue Jacket Bill, sir, or his ghost."

"This is remarkable, driver," said the colonel, and then he asked Mexican Joe to tell him the whole story.

Joe did so, even to the bet, made with the outlaw chief, showing the bag of gold.

"If you lose I'll pay the bet, Joe, and I'll see that that bold boy Redfern gets news of this affair at the earliest possible moment," and Colonel Rockwood sent his orderly after the four miners who also told the doleful story, but brightened up when the commandant said that Redfern, the young Gold Revolver Sharp, would soon be upon the trail of the Blue Jackets.

They also stated that they had a few hundreds each in their belts, and admitted that had they been sober the four of them would have



made a bold fight with Mexican Joe's aid, and perhaps beaten the outlaws off.

So the coach rolled on its way, while Colonel Rockwood wrote a letter hastily and dispatched it by special courier.

It was addressed to:

"ROY REDFERN,  
El Paso, Texas."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### LARIAT DICK TAKES THE TRAIL.

WHEN Lariat Dick fell unconscious upon the piazza of Settler Baxter's home, he was seen by Ruth, who quickly called aid.

He was seen to have received a bad cut on the head, from which he had bled freely, and he was at once taken back to his room and put to bed.

The settler was out upon his place, but soon came, and a physician who lived ten miles away was sent for with all haste.

What had happened neither the father or daughter could guess, and Lariat Dick was unable to tell.

The physician arrived by night, and found the young miner in a high fever, and delirious.

He dressed his wound, gave him some medicine, and awaited at the cabin all night to note the result.

The next morning he said that the miner had brain fever, and only the best of care could save his life.

"He shall have it," Ruth quickly responded.

Then the settler took several of his men and followed the trail of the miner after he left his home on his way back to the mines.

In a few hours he returned, and told Ruth that the miner had been ambushed and robbed by some one, but who did the deed there was no means of finding out.

He never for a moment thought of the man who had gone down into the canyon at Lariat Dick's shot.

But Ruth did, and asked:

"Could it have been that man, father?"

"My child, can the dead come to life again?"

"But are we sure he was killed?"

"The chances of his not being were one in a million."

"Still that might have been his chance."

"No, I cannot believe it; but we will wait until Lariat Dick is able to tell us."

"Yes, if he ever is; but, father, why does he hide his name from us?"

"Some whim of his, my child, for I do not believe him to be a bad man."

"Or a fugitive from justice, as many here on the frontier are."

"No, if he was a fugitive, I think he would have given us an assumed name to avoid causing suspicion."

"True."

And so the weeks passed away until at last the strong frame of the young miner defeated disease, the fever was broken and he awoke one morning very weak, but with every prospect of speedy recovery.

"Your life has been saved by the devoted love of Ruth Baxter, sir, if it is any pleasure for you to know it," said the physician.

"It is," was the quiet response.

"There is no longer need of my services, so I will leave you a tonic to take and give you into the charge of your friends who will soon bring you round."

"Doctor, I have not a dollar here to pay you, but I have money at my cabin."

"The one who tried to kill me, robbed me of everything."

"My dear sir, I am in no need, and when you come again to see Settler Baxter bring me what you deem right."

"I have made you just twelve visits, so the fee will not break you," and clasping his patient's hand the physician took his leave.

From that day Lariat Dick improved rapidly, and in ten days was able to be out.

One afternoon he rode with the settler and Ruth up to the scene of the ambush.

He could tell nothing, for he had not seen his enemy.

But he went over the scene like one who understood what he was about, and then made his way to the spot where Ruth had taken the daring leap.

He laid down and looked over and gave a low whistle.

"What is it, Dick?" asked the settler.

"There is a tree below the edge here some ten feet, and the roots are some of them pulled out."

"That man may have caught there."

"But that would have done no good."

"You say he had his lariat about his waist, Miss Ruth?"

"Yes, to bind me with, he told me."

Lariat Dick at once took his own and the settler's lariats and made them fast to a tree.

Then he lowered himself over the edge of the cliff as coolly as a sailor would have done, and began to swing outward and back until his feet rested upon the tree.

It bent under his weight, but supporting himself with his lariats he slowly reached the position.

After a long while, it seemed to those above, he came up over the cliff.

"Well?" said Trent Baxter eagerly.

"The horse went down, the man did not."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, he was lodged in the tree while we stood here talking about him."

"But how do you know, Lariat Dick?"

"Well, the tree has given considerable, there are marks upon it where a rope has been tied to hold the man in at night, and small rocks were taken out of crevices, while, best proof of all, I found this there," and he held up a white silk handkerchief from which strips had been torn.

"He had a white silk handkerchief," said Ruth.

"We will now ride around to the other side, for he could not get up from this."

"Nor from the other."

"That remains to be seen, settler," and mounting their horses they rode around to the other side of the canyon.

There Lariat Dick went to work in the same systematic manner as before.

"See here, settler, do you see those scratches upon the rocks?"

"Yes."

"They were made by feet."

"The man is not a bird, Dick."

"No, but he swung across the canyon at the end of a lariat."

"How could he?"

"Here is a rock with pieces of the handkerchief on it," said Ruth.

"Yes, he tied a rock to the end of his lariat, made it secure with strips from his silk handkerchief and practiced until he threw it so as to catch around some limb."

"Now to find the limb."

"Lariat Dick you are a wonder," said the settler.

"No, I am reading very plain signs—see, here is the limb," and he pointed to where the lariat had drawn tightly around the branch of the tree, as was plainly shown by the bruised bark.

"Now, my man went from here to the trail, and seeing me, while he had his lariat, he simply roped me, for my neck proved that."

"He needed food and a home, and he got all I had—see?"

"Yes, I see that you have solved the mystery," said the latter admiringly.

"And the next thing is to find the man," was Lariat Dick's determined response.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### LARIAT DICK MAKES ANOTHER DISCOVERY.

BACK to the settlers' home rode the party, all impressed with the discovery that had been made.

That evening as they sat together upon the piazza, Lariat Dick said:

"Trent Baxter, I think I am well enough to start home."

"It's a long ride, Dick."

"I'll go slow; but I'll have to get an outfit from you, of horse, weapons and all that."

"Certainly, all I have is at your service, Dick, but you better not be in a hurry."

"Oh, I'm all right now, only I don't know how I can ever get even with you and Miss Ruth."

"Don't speak of what we did, Dick, in the face of your services to us," said the settler.

"Well, I'll go back and sell out my mining interests, and then take a trip southward."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I've got a snug sum saved up to my credit in the Bank of Omaha, and I can get a good price for my mine, I think."

"I hope so, Dick, but remember, you will always find this your home, whether you are rich or poor."

"You are very kind to a poor wanderer, Mr. Baxter," replied Lariat Dick, and then the conversation turned upon his going away.

The next day he again started upon his way to his cabin, following the same trail on which he had very nearly lost his life.

A ride of several days brought him to the mining country, and he rode up to his cabin one evening just before sunset.

It was locked, and all as he had left it, but it seemed very dreary to him now for some reason.

The next morning he rode down to the mining-camp, known as Metal City, and stuck up a notice there in a store which read:

"Lariat Dick will sell his mine to any one who has got the dust to pay for it."

"Apply to Lariat Dick, Nugget Gulch, Smoky Range."

Purchasing what supplies he needed, Lariat Dick set out upon a voyage of discovery before returning to his cabin.

He had heard the name of Ben Bostwick mentioned somewhere in the mines, and he wished to find that personage.

Many had heard of the man, but did not know just where to locate him, and so Lariat Dick started upon his return to his home.

He had a good load upon his horse, so dismounted to walk up a long and steep hill, the animal following.

As he neared the summit he saw two men crouching behind a bowlder, their rifles ready in hand, their faces turned upon the trail on the other side of the ridge.

"That looks like an ambush," he muttered, and he quickly led his horse behind a thicket, and creeping nearer to the two men, called out as he covered them:

"Hands up, pards, for only a coward will shoot a man from ambush."

The men started to their feet, but they obeyed the command, for each felt that he was covered.

But one looked as though he'd chance a shot, when Lariat Dick sung out:

"Shoot them, boys, if they wink!"

That settled it, for not seeing the "boys," or knowing how many there were, the man called out:

"I squeal, pard."

"Count me another," said the other.

"Watch 'em, boys, while I clip their claws," commanded Lariat Dick, and he stepped quickly forward and disarmed first one and then the other.

Tossing their belts and arms behind him, he said coolly:

"Now, what game were you after, pards?"

"We was just a-restin'."

"Yes, I see, with your rifles leveled to kill that horseman."

"Ho, stranger! do you know these gents?"

The one addressed had suspected no one's presence until the call of Lariat Dick, who now threw himself upon his guard, revolver in hand.

He was a fine-looking man of fifty, dressed in a corduroy suit, top-boots and slouch hat, and looked like a miner who had struck it rich and was content to take life easy.

"Ah! what's up?" he asked.

"I was on my way up the ridge trail, and came up in the rear of these men, who had their rifles trained on you."

"Thinking I had backers, they wilted, and I clipped their claws, sir."

"If I'd 'a' know'd yer were alone I'd 'a' kilt yer," growled one.

"Yes, we'd hev done you up."

"It would have been a three-handed game, pards, for I don't die easy."

"I know those men, my young friend, and it has not been a week since they threatened to have my life."

"Ben Bostwick is your friend for life, and that is no idle thing to say," and the horseman held out his hand.

"Did you call yourself Ben Bostwick, sir?"

"I did, for such is my name."

"I was looking for you, sir."

"Indeed, and how can I serve you, for I am more than willing."

"What shall we do with these men?"

"I would do the country a service to shoot them both; but let them go, if you wish, for I have no fear of them, as I shall put a dozen men on their trail to-morrow, and they know what that means if they are caught."

"Don't you, men?"

One of them made a significant gesture toward his neck, while the other said:

"If you'll let us go, Boss Bostwick, we'll git out of the mines for sart'in."

"Go then, and if you are caught you shall hang, for I'll put men on your trail to-morrow sure."

Lariat Dick stepped forward and picked up their weapons, which he tossed into the bed of a small stream fed by a spring up on the ridge.

"By the time you fish those out, it will be dark and you can not follow our trail."

"Will you come with me, sir?"

"Certainly," and the two rode off together.

"My cabin is but a few miles from here, Mr."



Bostwick, and I will be glad to have you remain all night, for I have something to say to you of importance."

"Lead on, my young friend, for I was looking for a camping-place when you saved me from those two villains, whom I discharged from my employ in the Golden Gulch country for stealing, for I have a mine there."

"Then you do not live in these parts?"

"No, I am here looking for any good paying lead to purchase it."

"Ah! then you are just the man I was looking for," was Lariat Dick's earnest rejoinder.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

##### A HUNDRED FOLD.

LARIAT DICK was a good host, and he had a fresh supply of provisions, so that Ben Bostwick was sure of a good supper and a clean place to sleep in at least.

He soon realized that fact, and as the young miner cooked supper he watched him curiously and with interest.

He was not a demonstrative man, but he appreciated fully that he owed to Lariat Dick his life.

At last supper was ready, and heartily enjoyed, after which the two men sat down for a smoke and a talk.

The stranger opened the conversation by saying:

"So you have a mine to sell, have you?"

"Yes, sir, I advertised it at the store to-day."

"No need, for I will buy it."

"Yes, you wish to repay me for saving your life."

"No, no, I told you I was looking for mining property to buy."

"Well, I have a good lead, which has banked me some twenty thousand, while I have a couple of thousands of dust on hand."

"I have worked it for three years, so you can see that is worth what I ask—five thousand cash."

"I'll take it; but why do you sell if it's a fair question?"

"I'll tell you how it is."

"Some three months ago we captured a man here, for I am a Vigilante, whom we had reason to believe was the New Mexican outlaw Blue Jacket Bill."

"We hanged him—"

"So I heard."

"But I had my doubts, and went back and cut him down."

"He was not dead, so I coaxed him back to life after a mighty hard time of it."

"Then I brought him here, and when he was able to travel went with him to his home."

"I wished to see just what a mistake we had made."

"I got within sight of his home, when, being some distance ahead I saw a horseman chasing a girl on horseback."

"She took a leap across a canyon I would not risk, and I dropped the horse and man into the opening as they were going over."

"To my surprise I found it was the daughter of the man I had saved, and his home was near."

"The daughter told us that this man had come to their home."

"He had once been her father's friend, but had ruined him financially, and, from a striking resemblance between them, had taken even his name and committed crimes under it."

"He had for some reason wished to get rid of her father, and kidnap her, and so she had fled from him, when I got my shot in and checked his career, as I thought."

"After a few days at the settlers' cabin, I started for home, but was ambushed, lariat-ed, and received a cut in my head that laid me up for weeks with brain fever."

"I was robbed of my horse, money and weapons, and barely got back to Baxter's cabin when I fell."

"When able to do so, I took the trail of my assailant, and discovered that he had caught in a tree in his fall, while his horse went on down."

"With his lariat he had escaped, and he it was who had ambushed me."

"From the man's resemblance to Settler Baxter, I am sure now, for the man known as Blue Jacket Bill had also claimed his name. I believe that he was the outlaw chief."

"I have a score to settle with him, be he who he may, and so I shall go down to New Mexico and look up this man and square accounts with him, for I'd know him from his resemblance to the man whom he has so basely wronged."

"You called him Baxter, I believe?"

"Yes, Trent Baxter was the settler's name, and it was the name taken by the one whom I believe to be Blue Jacket Bill."

"And Trent Baxter is the settler whom you rescued?"

"Yes, sir."

"And his daughter, too?"

"Yes, sir, Miss Ruth."

"Where did you hear of me?"

"He was up here looking for you when the Regulators caught him."

"Ah, yes, he is my friend, and once did me a great service, which I am happy to say now will repay him a hundred-fold."

"I had a mine which I feared I would lose to creditors, and Baxter gave me the money to free myself, and I made him half-owner."

"But now to a point which you have explained to me."

"I did not know Baxter very well, and yet when, a year or more ago, a man came to my camps, and calling me Bostwick in a familiar way, said that he was my friend Trent Baxter, Somehow, though he looked it, I could not believe it, and when he demanded a settlement I put him off by saying that the mines were just beginning to pay, and in six months I could give him a generous share."

"Still he came to me again, and I gave him more money, yet could not bring myself to believe that he was really Trent Baxter."

"I last saw him three months ago, and convinced against my will that he was Baxter, I told him that at a certain time I would close out my interests and we would have a settlement together."

"The time appointed was one month ago, and as he did not come I was at a loss to understand it."

"But now I do, and he was the impostor, your friend being my friend, Trent Baxter; and if you are going by his home on your way South, I'll accompany you, for I am a very rich man, Lariat Dick, and he is half owner with me."

"Now we understand each other, I believe."

"There is no denying that, pard, and it will be a happy day for me when I ride up to Baxter's ranch with you as my comrade," said Lariat Dick, earnestly.

And three days after the two were on their way to the home of Settler Baxter.

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### REDFERN THE RANGER.

THERE was a mystery hanging over a grand old hacienda in Mexico which no one seemed just able to solve.

The place looked more like a fort than a house, and its owner was proprietor of the acres for miles surrounding it.

Thousands of cattle fed upon the prairies, and large herds of mustangs roved about attended by herders and bearing the peculiar brand of the fair owner—for a woman presided over all—a brand representing a human eye.

It was said by those who knew that the hacienda was as grand as a palace, and furnished as luxuriously.

The mistress of all was vastly rich, and her father had been a distinguished Mexican officer, a commander of Lanceros.

By some service rendered, his rank descended in his family, and only one child being his, a girl, she claimed and received the rank at her father's death.

She was known in public as Senora Dolores, and to her people as the Lady Captain.

It was said that she had over a hundred men in her employ, and that they were drilled as soldiers, and certainly she had rendered good service with them in beating back the Comanches in several raids.

The Lady Captain stood well with the Government of Mexico, and yet she was never known to receive visitors, and lived the life of one exiled.

To even her soldiers she went veiled, and she was known also as the Veiled Lady.

On one occasion she had come by coach to Devil's Ranch, and no one there saw her face.

It was soon seen that she came for a purpose, and her purpose was revenge.

In some way the Sharp from Texas, Trent Baxter, as he was called also, had won her mortal enmity, and the Veiled Lady would have killed the gambler but for the interference of Redfern the Revolver Sharp.

The Veiled Lady had left Devil's Ranch as she had come, by coach, and Redfern had followed, to solve the mystery regarding her.

He overtook the coach to scare off a band of Blue Jackets, and learned that they had halted the stage to make the Veiled Lady a prisoner.

But she had left the coach before, when a party of masked horsemen had met it, and she

had ridden away with them upon a horse that had been brought for her.

Redfern did not yield his determination, for some strange influence drew him toward the woman, and he took her trail and followed her to Mexico.

By a bold act he had gained an interview with her, and when he left her it was with a promise to come again, and more, he wore a badge of protection which she gave him.

After having, as he believed, seen Blue Jacket Bill hanged, he had resigned his position as scout at Fort Blanco, and set off for Mexico.

And it is there that the reader will accompany, to the hacienda of the Lady Captain of Lanceros.

To the surprise of her people an American youth had come to the hacienda, and the Lady Captain had adopted him as her son.

And more, from that day she had been no longer the Veiled Lady of Mexico, for she had cast aside her veil and her deep mourning, and come out in all the beauty of her lovely face, revealing that she was a woman nearing two-score years and whose life held some dark secret which she kept from the world.

Redfern had at once been made the commander of her Cowboy Rangers, and besides he was given the management of the estate.

What it all meant her people could not understand, and yet not one dared raise a dissenting voice.

One pleasant afternoon the Senora Dolores was seated in her luxurious boudoir, when the Senor Redfern was announced.

He bent gracefully over and imprinted a kiss upon her forehead, while he said:

"I have returned, my mother, and I believe there is not the slightest danger of trouble with the red-skins."

"I am glad to hear this, Roy! but here is a letter which came for you to-day by special courier."

"I sent word that you were absent, and would return response when you came back."

"That was right, mother, but it is an official communication, and bears the Fort Blanco stamp—yes, it is from Colonel Rockwood."

He opened the letter and read aloud:

"MY DEAR REDFERN:—"

"When you left the fort you told me that if I needed you I must call upon you for your services."

"I do need you, and beg you to fulfill the promise made me, for there is work ahead which I believe you alone can do."

"So come I beg of you, and if you have changed your mind about the commission in the United States Army, I believe I can assure you that it is at your service."

"Hoping soon to see you."

"I remain your friend,"

"ROCKWOOD."

"He writes you a kind letter, my son."

"Yes, mother, and though unofficial, it is a demand upon me."

"Will you go, my son?"

"Yes, mother."

"When will you start?"

"To-night, mother," was the prompt response of the young scout.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### MET BY CHANCE.

THE young ranger was one to attract attention anywhere.

He was hardly over eighteen, and his face was refined and intelligent, while it was stamped with decision and character beyond his years.

His eyes a woman might be proud to possess, and in fact there was almost feminine beauty stamped upon every feature.

But then there was a manliness about him too that one could hardly fail to observe, while his form was tall, sinewy and graceful.

His hair was worn in wavy masses, falling upon his broad shoulders, and this added to his effeminate look, while his good looks were heightened by his wearing a broad-brimmed scarlet sombrero, embroidered in gold and looped up upon the side by a pin representing a human eye, the black being of onyx, the white of pearls, and a diamond for the pupil, all set in solid gold.

His costume was that of a Mexican caballero and gorgeous in the extreme, while his scarlet sash but half concealed a trio of gold-mounted revolvers of large caliber, and a long-bladed knife, the hilt of which was gold, with a miniature sombrero of rubies set in it.

Massive gold spurs adorned his boot-heels, and altogether he was a very striking looking youth.

Such was the mere boy in years who had



gained the name across the Rio Grande of being the most daring horseman, deadliest shot and best lariat-thrower on the plains.

He was also noted as a bold gambler who played to win and for any stakes, while it was said that he had wrongs to avenge against the Indians and had a string of scalps that would have driven a big chief mad with envy.

He had won the name of the Scarlet Sombrero and the Gold Revolver Sharp, and he was respected by all with whom he came in contact and feared by evil-doers.

Some said that he was a Mexican, others called him a Texan, and he spoke both Mexican and English perfectly, and never referred to his antecedents.

A mystery seemed to always hang about him, and though he had been a special scout at Fort Blanco he had never drawn a dollar of pay, telling the paymaster when he left to give it to a charitable purpose.

Why he had gone to Mexico no one knew, and though living there in luxury, the acknowledged heir of the richest woman in the country, he had obeyed a call to return to Fort Blanco for a special duty.

And before he left he had received another call from one who was his friend, telling him of the murder of Miner Gray St. John of Yellow Canyon.

That call came from Landlord Du Val, and either one he would have been prompt to obey. Such was Redfern the Ranger.

When she had heard his decision, the Senora Dolores said.

"Not a word would I say, Roy, to prevent your going; but I do insist that you shall not go unattended."

"Who must accompany me, mother?"

"Pick your own men from among your Red Hat Rangers, for you must have an escort, if they go secretly as such."

"I will do as you wish, mother," was the response, and two hours after Redfern was riding toward the Rio Grande splendidly mounted, and with a score of daring horsemen following him.

When Redfern had crossed the Rio Grande, when daylight dawned upon him, he was alone.

Not a solitary Red Hat Ranger was in sight, and he rode along at a brisk pace, as though anxious to make the best of time, and reach the fort as soon as possible.

He was looking about for a camping-place for the night, while the sun was yet half an hour high, for he had pressed his splendid horse hard all day, when he beheld a horseman coming toward him.

He did not halt, but simply loosened a revolver in its holster, and rode on, viewing the stranger with a searching eye.

The stranger was in a good locality for any one to look out for a foe, red-skin or pale-face.

He had ridden out of a timber motte, and seemed to be following a trail.

But he saw the Red Hat Ranger as soon as he was discovered, and he too prepared to meet a foe, if foe it proved.

As Redfern drew nearer he saw that the stranger was a well-formed fellow, armed with rifle and revolvers, and was riding a horse that showed fine points.

He was a young man, dressed in corduroy, top-boots and slouch hat, and there was that in his handsome face to cause a feeling of confidence rather than mistrust.

The two drew rein when about thirty paces from each other, and Redfern called out:

"Well, pard, is it war or peace, for I am ready for either?"

It was a bold challenge, and the stranger smiled at the plucky way in which it had been uttered.

But he responded:

"You are Redfern, the Revolver Sharp?"

"I am Redfern, and they talk other names to me, among which is the one you named."

"Then I am on your trail."

"For peace or war, I asked, senor?"

"That depends upon you, for I am a peaceful fellow."

"But I was going to Mexico to find you."

"I am glad to have saved you a long ride, senor."

"But, may I ask your name?"

"Lariat Dick."

"Ah! I recall your face now, for I saw you at the hanging of Blue Jacket Bill up in Colorado."

"Pard Redfern, I have got something to say to you about that very hanging."

"Do you ride all night, or shall we camp?"

"I was looking for a camping-place when I saw you, for my horse has come a long jaunt."

"Well, back in the timber yonder is good water, wood and a snug camping-place."

"Shall I surrender you my weapons to show you good faith on my part?"

"Oh, no, we are on equal terms with or without weapons."

"We will camp, now, Lariat Dick, and get better acquainted with each other," and Redfern led the way toward the timber island.

#### CHAPTER XIX.

##### STARTLING TIDINGS.

THE place spoken of by Lariat Dick, as a good camping-ground was as he had represented it.

There was a cool spring, an abundance of grass, and the situation was a good one for defense.

In among the timber there was little danger of being seen there, for a vista of miles around did not show a human being in sight.

The miner and the ranger opened their respective haversacks of provisions, built a fire and had a very enjoyable supper together. Redfern showing not the slightest curiosity to know why Lariat Dick was on his way to Mexico to see him.

Lariat Dick lighted his pipe after supper, spread his blankets and sat down quietly upon them.

Redfern did not smoke, but spread his gorgeous serapes, and throwing himself upon them seemed ready to go to sleep, when the miner said:

"You remember I was one of the Regulators that helped hang Trent Baxter?"

"Yes, I remember your face well now."

"Do you recall that I urged against the hanging, saying there might be a mistake, and to give the man the benefit of the doubt?"

"Yes, you did, and several others agreed with you, I believe."

"True, but all yielded to your judgment in the case."

"Yes, I knew him too well to be mistaken."

"And yet you were mistaken, my young friend."

"Senor!"

"I say that you made a sad mistake, for that man was not Blue Jacket Bill."

"Senor, you are deceived, for I saw, as I believed at a glance, that he was the man I had trailed for a long while."

"It was I who gave the alarm to the Vigilantes that Blue Jacket Bill was in the mines."

"I know that, sir; but that was not the man, as I can prove to you."

"No, for I had an unfailing proof, and I put it to the test when I, a second time looked in the man's face, for something about him, and his manner of speaking caused me to doubt for a moment."

"May I ask what your proof was?"

Redfern did not speak for moment and then said:

"It was a proof that two men who resembled each other could not possess."

"You will not tell me what it was?"

"Well, yes."

"Do you see this pin?" and Redfern took his red sombrero from his head and pointed to the human eye.

"Yes, I observed it, and it is a remarkable pin indeed."

"It works on a swivel, as you see, and turns when I press this spring."

"You see any change in it?"

"None, sir."

"Now watch close."

"Do you note a change now?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I could not tell you to save my life, yet there is a change."

"See, this pin is a human eye composed of pearls, onyx and a diamond, with a gold back-ground."

"The onyx here, you see, is black."

"Yes, I see."

"Now make the change, for this eye is the same with the exception that in place of the dark stone these are *uorquoise*."

"Yes, the eyes, I see now are made to represent a dark eye and a blue one."

"Yes."

"Well, what does that mean?"

"It means that Blue Jacket Bill is the only man I ever saw who had the remarkable peculiarity of one blue and one black eye, Senor Lariat Dick," said Redfern, earnestly.

"Ha! now I understand you, and you saw that peculiarity in the man you said was the outlaw chief?"

"I did, senor, and that convinced me that I was not wrong."

"Yet you were wrong, as the man we hanged had one blue and one black eye."

"And was Blue Jacket Bill."

"No, he was Trent Baxter, a settler."

"That is the name Blue Jacket Bill was known by in the mines."

"I know, but he assumed the name of a man who had been his friend, forged his name and nearly ruined him financially, after which he fled to the mines and became an outlaw."

"The man whom he closely resembled, even to the blue and the black eye, took what he could save out of his fortune, and with his only child, a daughter, and a few faithful negroes, established a new home for himself on the frontier as a settler."

"He went up into Colorado to find one whom he had helped, was captured, and from his striking resemblance to Blue Jacket Bill was strung up by the Vigilantes."

"My God, Senor Lariat Dick, if your words are true I have made an error that is criminal, and remorse will haunt me through life."

"But no, no, you are mistaken."

"Scout Redfern, let me tell you now that though the Vigilantes hanged Trent Baxter the settler, he is not dead, for I, doubting as I did, went back, cut him down and brought him back to life."

"Thank God for that! but I only hope you have made no mistake."

"No, senor, I took the man to my cabin, for I am a miner, or was rather, and when he was able to travel went home with him."

"There I found to my joy that he had told the truth, and you will be glad to hear all that I have to tell of him and his daughter."

Then Lariat Dick went on to tell the story of the settler's home, and of his rescue of Ruth and what followed.

When he made known that the foe of the settler claimed to be Trent Baxter, and had been the one who had ambushed him, Redfern said quickly:

"That man is Blue Jacket Bill!"

"That was my belief."

"And I have my work to do over, to run him down."

"That is why I have come to seek you."

"Then you shall go with me if you will, and next time, Lariat Dick, there shall be no mistake about the man whom we hang."

"None, I am sure," was the reply of Lariat Dick, and the two talked on for a long time in regard to what was to be done to run the daring Chief of the Blue Jackets to death.

When they started on their way the next morning, the two, now firm pals, took the direct trail for Devil's Ranch.

#### CHAPTER XX.

##### THE PARSON'S STORY.

A PERFECT howl of delight went up one morning early, from the early frequenters of the bar of the New Mexico, when a servant gave the information that Parson Freeze had returned to Devil's Ranch.

He had not given any reason for his sudden going and mysterious absence, but had gone to his room asking not to be disturbed until a late hour.

The "parson" had become popular in the camps, and the boys were glad to see him back again.

They enjoyed his singing and sermons, and were always ready to chip in their contributions to help their own salvation.

Indeed many of them considered that "chipping in" liberally would help them in the long run at Judgment Day.

When Landlord Du Val, who was never an early riser, arose and heard the news, he too was gratified to know that Parson Freeze was again in Devil's Ranch.

He sent up word for him to come down and breakfast with him, and soon after the parson put in an appearance.

He was neatly dressed in black, had on a spotless white choker, but there was a woe-begone expression in his face which almost made the landlord laugh.

"Delighted to see you back again, parson, for we have all been most anxious about you."

"We feared that you had been killed."

"Ah no, Brother Du Val, no one would kill a poor innocent like me, though I have been in the den of lions."

"Well, it must have been a relief to get out of this den of wolves, as Devil's Ranch certainly is: but where have you been?"

"I'll tell you."

"I went over, or rather started one afternoon to minister to a poor miner who was ill, when, over near Rocky Glen I was set upon by three



men, sized, gagged and bound to the back of a horse.

"We traveled for hours through the night, and the last part of the journey I was blindfolded.

"Then we halted at a small camp in a canyon and I was given a blanket to sleep upon and told if I attempted to escape I would be shot.

"I determined not to attempt to get away.

"The next morning the cause of my capture came out.

"The men were masked but I have reason to believe they are from Devil's Ranch.

"They said that they knew that I had thousands of dollars, given me by miners, and if I would send one of their number to get it, I should go free.

"I told them that I had sent the generous contributions away, which the miners had given to me—given it into the church treasury.

"But they would not believe me and so held me a prisoner until at last they were convinced that I told the truth.

"They threatened me with death, and day and night one of them was constantly guarding me.

"At last they determined to let me go, and blindfolded and bound I was brought back right to the outer camps and released.

"I have suffered much, my friend, in body and mind."

Du Val gave the parson his deepest sympathy and a fifty-dollar bank note, which latter he appreciated most.

Then he told him of the murder of Miner St. John and of the recent robbery of the coach by the Blue Jackets.

"I thought they were dead," said the parson.

"So we all hoped, or at least frightened off; but this proves that Blue Jacket Bill was not the man whom the Colorado Regulators hanged.

"But I hope he will be taken soon."

"Is there any chance of it?"

"Well, parson, don't give it away, but there is."

"I am delighted to hear this, Brother Du Val, for that bold bad man should be taken and hanged."

"The next time he is taken there will be no doubt about his being hanged, for I shall attend the affair myself, if possible."

"But what are the chances of his capture, may I ask, brother?" said the parson, helping himself to a third piece of venison.

"Well, as I said, don't give it away; but I have written to Redfern to come on."

"I have heard the men speak of him, even as of a David of old."

"Yes, he is a wonderful boy, yet a man in strength, experience and deeds."

"How he could have made the mistake he did about hanging the wrong man for Blue Jacket Bill I do not know; but it was done, that is certain."

"Now Redfern was very much attached to Miner St. John and he will track his murderer down, and I am sure, as Blue Jacket is again in the mines, that he is the one who committed the murder."

"But might not some of the band of Blue Jackets been playing the part of their chief?"

"No, for he is a man who could not disguise himself."

"Who saw him?"

"Mexican Joe who knew him well, and I would not be at all surprised if he was not the one who kidnapped you."

"Now I guess you are right, Brother Du Val, and though it's my duty to pray for my enemies, no prayer shall I utter for that vile man Blue Jacket Bill," and the parson spoke as though in this case he would neglect his duty and teachings.

Soon he asked:

"Do you expect this young giant soon?"

"You mean Redfern?"

"Yes, brother."

"I hope so, for I am not the only one who was sent for him and he will obey the call."

Now go out and let the boys see that you are back, and if half of them don't get dressed in honor of the occasion, I will be greatly surprised," said Du Val with a laugh.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE PARSON RECEIVES A FEE.

DEVIL'S RANCH was delighted at the return of Parson Freeze, and an orgie was held in honor of the occasion, which ended in half a dozen fights and a shooting scrape.

He had his hands full of work, and a generous contribution was taken up as a salve for what he had suffered while in the hands of the "Philistines," as he called his kidnappers.

Sunday came and the parson was in his element.

He held service in the afternoon on the piazza of the hotel, and his voice was rolling out hymns in a manner that made his hearers feel, when a horseman rode up and dismounted.

In spite of the parson's singing a cheer went up from the congregation for:

"The Gold Revolver Sharp!"

It was Redfern.

Raising his scarlet sombrero in response to the welcome of the crowd, he dismounted and went with Senor Du Val into the hotel.

That night another horseman arrived at the New Mexico and he wrote his name in the register:

"Lariat Dick, Colorado."

The following day and night other strangers dropped in and put up at the New Mexico, until several miners remarked that there was something up sure as shootin'.

Redfern had kept himself very quiet since his coming, and he had gone off somewhere with Du Val; but the miners seemed to feel that the reappearance of Blue Jacket Bill upon the trails had something to do with his coming again to Devil's Ranch.

He had reported himself that he had seen Blue Jacket Bill hanged in Colorado, and now here turned up the outlaw chief once more upon the trails; and that Redfern must keep up his reputation by hunting him down, and having no mistake about it this time, was the universal decision of the miners.

Parson Freeze had taken the first opportunity he could to meet Redfern, and Senor Du Val had introduced them after the youth had been in Devil's Ranch a couple of days.

It was in the Gambling Hall, where a dozen games were going on, the parson had to fight the Devil with fire, he said, so frequented all the places where there was any wickedness going on.

"I am glad to meet you, parson, and I am going to ask you to do me a favor," said Redfern.

"Yes, certainly, my young friend," was the reply.

"I had a friend murdered up in Yellow Canyon, and he is one I thought a great deal of, while I made a pledge to him that I would carry out certain wishes he had for his wife and daughter, in case harm befell him here in the mines."

"Now I have ordered a coffin made for him, and I wish you to ride over with me to his camp and give him a decent burial, so I can tell his wife and daughter that he received Christian burial when I see them. Are you ill, parson?"

The parson had suddenly turned deathly pale, and reeling had nearly fallen.

But he recovered himself quickly, and said, faintly:

"Rum!"

The landlord got it for him, and dashing it off, he said, as the color came back to his face:

"A sudden faintness only, and I am subject to them."

"Sometimes they are most severe; but I am all right now—yes, all right now," and the parson still wore a weary look.

"You will go with me on this sacred duty, parson, for I assure you I will be glad to recompense you most liberally," said Redfern.

"I will go with you, my son; certainly, certainly."

"When will you go? To-morrow, parson?"

"Yes, yes, I'll be ready; but now excuse me, please, for I will lie down for awhile."

He arose and went to his room, but not to lie down, for he began to pace to and fro, his brows clouded, his lips firmly set.

"My God! must I do this?" he muttered over and over again.

At last a strange expression came into his eyes, a look that would have been becoming to Lucifer, and he hissed forth:

"Yes, I will; I can do anything."

The next morning early a party of five horsemen left the New Mexico.

Two of them were peon servants, one of them bearing a new-made coffin, the other a large bundle before them upon their saddles.

The other three were Senor Du Val, Redfern, and Parson Freeze.

The latter seemed not wholly to have recovered from his attack of the day before, for he was very pale and wore a haggard look.

It was a long ride to the Yellow Canyon, where was the cabin of Gray St. John, but the party rode briskly and reached there before noon.

The peons then dug a grave in a quiet, pretty spot, and the body was taken from its former

resting-place, wrapped in *serapes* and placed in the coffin which had been brought for it.

The parson did nothing to assist, but stood apart while the others did the work.

When the coffin was lowered into the grave Redfern called him and he came forward.

He seemed like a man deathly ill, but said that it was from his attack of the day before and his long ride, but revived after a pull at Senor Du Val's pocket-flask.

Then in a voice that quivered at times he read the service of the dead over the body of poor Miner St. John.

It was an impressive scene, and the voice of the parson, deep and sonorous, rolled through the rocky canyon in many an echo; but how much more impressive the scene, had all those present known the truth, the real cause of the emotion of the man who stood at the head of the grave, his voice reading the sacred words that consigned the form of the dead miner to the earth forever.

Perhaps the large fee the parson received from Redfern compensated in a measure for his suffering.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE ACCUSATION.

THE party returned from the burial of the miner, and yet, tired as was the parson, he was that night in the gambling hall of the New Mexico.

A much larger crowd than usual had gathered there for the coming of Redfern again to Devil's Ranch, after the attack of the Blue Jackets upon Mexican Joe's coach, proved that something of interest might be expected to happen.

They did not wish to miss that happening.

Then the presence of a dozen strangers in Devil's Ranch indicated to the curious that something out of the run might be sprung upon the camp at any time.

So a large crowd had gathered at the hall of chance, and the parson was circulating among them, with an admonition here, a warning there, and a kind word everywhere.

He looked better, and told Redfern, who asked about his health, that he thought that the attack had passed off wholly.

Among the strangers there in the hall was Lariat Dick.

He seemed to know no one, and not caring to play, watched the players with marked interest.

Others of the strangers were there, too, and most of them were gambling.

Several of them were Mexicans, but they spoke English well, and appeared to be as much at home in Devil's Ranch as in their native land.

Redfern strolled about in an indifferent sort of way, declining several invitations to play.

At last he went to a table where a large game was in progress.

The players were two of the men of Devil's Ranch and two strangers, and the latter seemed to be getting the worst of it.

At last Redfern said in his quiet way, addressing one of the strangers:

"Senor, why do you not play pards with your friend, for these two men play into each other's hands all the time?"

"How do you mean, senor?" asked one of the strangers, while the two men of Devil's Ranch uttered a malediction upon the interference of the scout.

But not noticing it, he said:

"If you play partners, then you are on equal terms with these sharps."

"I did not know they were acquainted, senor."

"Oh, yes, they are known here as cut-throat poker-players, and you see one is your partner, the other the partner of your friend. When they get a chance they exchange cards, and thus you are beaten."

"See here, Redfern, do you accuse us of cheating?" one of the men angrily demanded.

"Certainly I do; and that is not the only charge I make against one of you."

Several of the miners saw Redfern give a quick signal of some sort, for the two strangers covered one of the sharps at once, while the youth, quick as a flash, had a derringer muzzle in the face of the other.

He had not been seen to draw the dread weapon, but there it was in his hand, and he said in a voice that showed he meant work:

"Hands up, sharp, or I'll turn your body over for the parson to bury!"

The man, with a fierce imprecation, obeyed, while several of the hardest toughs in the mines gathered around, and one of them cried out menacingly:

"See here, boy, you are carrying too high a



hand in these mincs and your claws must be clipped."

Again Redfern was seen to make a quick signal, and the speaker and those who had stepped to his side, found that they were in the very midst of a number of men who were strangers in Devil's Ranch, but had their hands on their revolvers, and were ready to use them.

Then Redfern said quickly:

"If you interfere here, my man, you will find it hard work to explain to the good men of Devil's Ranch why you protect a Blue Jacket."

These words fell with startling effect upon the crowd, while a voice cried:

"Show us the Blue Jacket, Pard Redfern, and all who protect him!"

At this the bravo who had hoped to make a name by bluffing Redfern, quickly edged back from his position and the youth said in the most matter-of-fact way:

"Here is the Blue Jacket, pards; but, he is my game, not yours."

"Yer lies! I hain't no Blue Jacket," yelled the accused gambler.

"Very well. If I do not prove it, I'll give you leave to empty your revolver at me from ten paces distant."

"And if you does?" cried a voice.

"I'll see that he does not escape," was the significant response.

"Prove it!" shouted a number of voices.

"Yes, prove it, or he has the shots at yer," cried one, eager for the "fun."

"Prove it! Prove it, Pard Redfern!" and a perfect howl for proof went up, but not in the least disturbed by the row he had raised the youth faced the crowd and said calmly:

"I intend to prove it, men, and bag my game at the same time."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE PROOF.

SOMETHING in the look and manner of Redfern silenced the crowd, and all eyes were turned alternately upon him and the man who now had turned to a deathlike hue of face.

Parson Freeze, deeply interested in the scene, had come close to Redfern's side, and the stranger from Colorado, Lariat Dick, also stepped near and stood looking on, an anxious and interested spectator of all that occurred.

The landlord had also drawn near, and just then, as though by accident, the strangers noticed in the camps the past few days had drawn in a circle about the young Revolver Ranger.

The scene was now a calm one, but all knew that it might break forth in fury in a second of time.

"Men," remarked Redfern, as he glanced over the crowd, "the Blue Jackets are my deadly foes, and I am their enemy unto death. I happen to know something about them from close observation, and that knowledge comes to my aid now. Within the past year I have run to earth no less than nine of the band, though I did make a mistake in letting the Vigilantes hang the wrong man for Blue Jacket Bill. Had I thought a moment before condemning that poor fellow I would have looked for the sure proof that he was a Blue Jacket. I accused the man here whom you all knew as Trent Baxter the gambler, *alias* the Sharp from Texas, and he had the same proof that I speak of, and it may some day hang him. If I have my way it will. Each man whom I have captured, or killed of the Blue Jackets had the proof upon him that he is a member of the band."

"You may recall that I took men out of your midst, Cavalho, Corallez and others whom you little dreamed were Blue Jackets; but they were."

"Now, I repeat again, if I do not give the proof I claim, I will stand across this room, humbly ask this man's pardon, and permit him to empty his revolver at me; but he must be sure of his aim, for the seventh shot that is fired will come from my revolver at him."

"I now tell you that about this man's neck is a collar, pricked in india-ink in *blue*, representing a chain, to which hangs a padlock in *red ink*, and bearing the letters B. J. B."

"Men, there is my proof! The chain collar of the Blue Jackets!"

Redfern tore open the shirt of the man he accused, revealing the mark he had indicated!

A perfect yell of fury went up from the crowd, while the accused man uttered a cry of terror, and attempted to draw his revolver, but Redfern's derringer covered him, and he heard the words:

"Resist and you die!"

All men cling to life, no matter what the fate ahead of them, and though the gallows arose in

all its horror before him, the man did not resist, and thus end his life then and there.

He was quickly disarmed by Lariat Dick, while the crowd, now thirsting for the blood of the man whom no one doubted was one of the Blue Jacket Band, cried in savage tones:

"Now we'll swing him!"

"One more Blue Jay to hang!"

"Give him up, pard, and we'll hoist him!"

The mass of humanity made a move toward the man which seemed irresistible; but, Redfern's derringer suddenly disappeared, his revolver took its place, while he cried:

"Men, I claim this prisoner for the United States, and shall take him to Fort Blanco for trial, so don't crowd me!"

"Fort Blanco be blowed! We'll hang him here, and you kin try him arterwards."

The speaker was the fellow who, a short while before, had told Redfern he was carrying too high a hand in Devil's Ranch.

He was now wishing to hang the man he had sought to defend a few minutes before!

But his words met with the approbation of the crowd, and they still pressed forward toward the prisoner.

"Men, I know my duty and I shall do it. I warn you off!" again cried Redfern, while Du Val called out:

Boys, don't crowd him, for he's right, and don't you forget it."

"Waal, we has a say I guess, as well as Redfern, and I says hang the Blue Jay!"

It was the same bravo who had before spoken, and he made a spring for the trembling wretch.

But the sharp crack of the dauntless Redfern's revolver checked his spring and sent him down in a heap, a bullet in the very center of his forehead!

"If we can't hang a Blue Jay, you sha'n't kill a miner, Redfern," cried another voice, and a shout came from the crowd.

Instantly there was a rattling of revolvers, yet only for an instant, for the maddened crowd surged back now, in wild fright, for though Redfern's revolvers were barking, others about him were joining in the chorus, and it was seen that he had a full score of backers by his side, among whom were, Lariat Dick and the strangers in Devil's Ranch.

"That Redfern is the devil!" cried a miner as he sped out of the hall.

"Parson, you will have a busy day of it tomorrow," remarked Redfern coolly, and he walked out of the gambling hall with his prisoner, after whispering to the landlord:

"One of my men was killed and another wounded—please see to them."

"I will at once; but, did you see how cool the parson was under fire?"

"I noticed it, and that is not all," was the reply.

But, the parson overheard the words, and one instant after he, too, slipped out of the hall, unmindful of the wounded who might need the consolation of his presence.

Two hours after, Redfern had left with his prisoner, and Lariat Dick was with him.

The next morning not a stranger was to be seen in Devil's Ranch, and to the surprise of Landlord Du Val the parson was missing also.

"He must have gone with Redfern," he muttered.

But the landlord was wrong in this surmise for the parson had gone alone.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE PARSON GOES ON A JOURNEY.

THE words uttered by Redfern to Landlord Du Val, in the gambling hall, and overheard by Parson Freeze, seemed to impress the latter gentleman unpleasantly.

He quickly made his exit and sought his room in the New Mexico, unmindful of the rumor going the rounds that a miner who stood near him swore that he had seen the parson with a revolver in his hand, and he seemed so scared he was aiming at his friend Redfern.

But the parson had been not a few minutes in his room when he heard noises on the piazza below giving utterance to these very words:

"It's all up now with Parson Freeze, and I must look out for myself," muttered the man.

Then he muttered aloud:

"I did hope to get a chance to send that Yellow Canyon treasure through unsuspected by the coach, but that must wait for another time."

"Now there is but one thing for me to do and that is to get out of here."

"I can then go North and play the role of friend, and if I do not do so soon that infernal boy will get there first and win all."

"That is my only hope now for the future, un-

less I can venture back to Colorado and convince old Miner Ben Bostwick that I am really Trent Baxter, which the old fool doubts.

"But now to get out of this Devil's Ranch, which certainly is most properly named."

"Whew! but how the bullets flew to-night in the hall, and in ten seconds as many men went down."

"I did get in one shot at Redfern, but a fool put his head in between as I pulled the trigger and got the lead."

"And I was seen, too, so have no time to tarry here."

"That boy bears a charmed life, and is the coolest, deadliest shot I ever saw."

"Now to be off," and the parson quickly threw a few things together, not forgetting his money this time, lowered himself from his window, by aid of his lariat, and reaching the shed stables called for the landlord's best horse, which had been placed at his disposal by Senor Du Val.

Soon after he was riding out of Devil's Ranch at a gallop, and his course lay for the Blue Jackets' Toll Gate in Canyon Pass.

He dismounted at the canyon, and went on foot among the rocks.

Taking from the pack he carried a lantern he lighted it and soon reached a spot among the rocks which was a secure hiding place.

The lantern revealed that he had there some large bags of gold, and from one of these he took a few handfuls.

"I cannot take much so must leave it until another time, for it is safe here."

"If it had not been for that fracas to-night; I could have nipped Mexican Joe on his next trip, when I was a passenger, and the only one, and I'd carry this all through as Government treasure without mishap."

"But now it must wait, until I go north to play my cards with the wife and daughter of Gray St. John."

So saying he put out the lantern, left it in the hiding place, and returning to his horse once more continued on his way.

Once or twice during the night he halted to rest his horse, and just after dawn for breakfast.

But not for a long while, for he pushed on once more.

Toward noon his horse began to feel the pressure, and dismounting he walked by his side for miles, and then again halted for rest.

Night came and yet he did not go into camp for any length of time.

All during the day he had cast glances behind him, as though he feared pursuit.

Through the night he walked, leading his horse, and only at daybreak camped.

He went to sleep for a couple of hours, awoke, cooked his breakfast, and his horse being refreshed by food and rest, he urged him once more to a rapid gait and kept it up for hours.

He had avoided all regular trails, and seeming to know the country thoroughly, came in sight at sunset of a stage station upon another branch than the one which led to Devil's Ranch and by Fort Blanco.

To his joy he learned that a coach was expected within an hour, and he at once sold his horse for what he could get for him, and soon after he was going eastward, the only passenger in the coach, greatly to his delight.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE NOOSE TIGHTENING.

THE excitement was intense in Devil's Ranch the day following the fracas in the gambling hall of the New Mexico.

There were men who said that Redfern the Revolver Sharp never came there that a row did not follow, and others at once remarked in his defense, that he always took in some desperado or outlaw who needed hanging, while he certainly had not brought the trouble on.

He had even gone so far as to explain why he had demanded the prisoner whom he had taken with him.

This silenced the ill-feeling against the boy scout, or rather the open expression of it.

Many wondered why Redfern had gone out of Devil's Ranch that night with his prisoner, and who he took with him.

The report that he had resigned his place at the fort as scout was no longer believed, and the strangers seen in the place were set down as his secret pards.

What Lariat Dick, of Colorado, had to do with Redfern no one knew; but he was also found gone on the following morning.

What most surprised the ranchers was the disappearance of the parson.

He was wanted badly to make the burying a



success, and there were wounded men who wished to have a few words of consolation from a parson.

But that person had again mysteriously disappeared.

At first it was thought by Senor Du Val that he had accompanied Redfern; but then he changed his mind after a peon had reported the condition of the parson's room.

He at once made an investigation to find that this time the parson had premeditated a departure, and a lengthy if not a permanent stay.

He had taken everything with him except an extra Bible and a number of tracts.

Then, too, the landlord claimed that Parson Freeze had frozen to his best horse, and had left some time before Redfern, while no one except the stableman had seen him depart for other pastures.

So Landlord Du Val grew suspicious toward afternoon, for he, too, heard the rumors that Parson Freeze had drawn a revolver instead of a Bible, during the fracas, and had also fired a shot, not in the defense of law and order, but which had been aimed at Redfern.

So, late in the afternoon, Landlord Du Val returned to his own comfortable rooms and penned the following note:

"MY DEAR REDFERN:—

"Do you know that I believe that parson is a fraud of the greatest magnitude?

"Taking all in all, his emotion when you asked him to bury St. John, his strange manner at the grave, his former mysterious disappearance, and last night his drawing a revolver during the row and firing at you, put all together, convinces me that the parson is living a double life.

"I learn now that he left before you did, and he took with him all but his stock in trade, while he rode away the best horse I had in my stables.

"I give this information for what it is worth, and send a scout upon his trail, while a messenger bears this to the fort to you.

"The scout has orders to report to you there also, when he has fully gotten the direction which the parson took.

"Fortunately my horse, which the parson rode, was shod only yesterday, and for mountain work, so his tracks can be readily followed by a good trailer, which the man I send is.

"Permit me to congratulate you upon beginning your work well, and with regards to Lariat Dick believe me,

"Yours always,

"DU VAL."

In the mean while Redfern and Lariat Dick had gone on toward the fort with their prisoner, upon whose wrists the youth had slipped a pair of handcuffs.

They had ridden on until dawn, and there camped for breakfast and rest; continuing their way after several hours.

It was after nightfall when they reached the fort, and went directly to the quarters of Colonel Rockwood, where they were at once admitted.

Colonel Rockwood greeted the youth most warmly, saying in his pleasant way:

"I knew you would come, Redfern, at my call."

He also welcomed Lariat Dick cordially and then gave a glance at the prisoner.

Redfern understood the look and said:

"I have to report my arrival, Colonel Rockwood, and that of my comrade, Lariat Dick, and we are ready for duty, sir."

"But, I wish also to deliver to you this prisoner, whom I charge with being an outlaw of the Blue Jacket Band, and whose capture, I regret to say, caused several deaths at Devil's Ranch, for the miners wished to hang him then and there."

"Orderly, send a guard here for this prisoner," called out Colonel Rockwood, and when the Blue Jacket was removed, Redfern gave his reason for having arrested the man.

"I saw him cheating two of my men, sir, and as his shirt collar was unfastened, I caught a glimpse of the secret sign of the Blue Jackets, so determined to arrest him, and I only regret that there was fatality attending my doing so."

"But, Colonel Rockwood, I have another story for you to hear, and Lariat Dick here will tell it to you, so as to explain my report of having seen Blue Jacket Bill hanged."

Lariat Dick then told his story, and the colonel was greatly surprised, but was glad to know that the settler had escaped, and congratulated the young miner upon his good work.

Then Redfern said:

"Colonel Rockwood, I hope I am not making another mistake in wrongfully accusing an innocent man! but I believe that a parson now at Devil's Ranch is not all that he represents himself to be, for in the unpleasantness that followed my capture of the Blue Jacket in the

gambling hall, I certainly saw him aim a revolver at me and pull trigger, but another got the bullet, and I concluded, as the fight ended in about fifteen seconds, to pretend I did not see it.

"Now I wish to start upon the track of that parson, and something tells me I will not go upon a fruitless errand."

"I leave the whole matter in your hands, Redfern, and congratulate you upon having so able an ally as your friend here."

"Hunt down the Blue Jackets in your way, and when their chief is again caught, make no mistake in your man," said Colonel Rockwood.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ON THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT.

THE next morning, after the arrival of Redfern at the fort, the messenger came from Senor Du Val, and the youth carried the landlord's letter at once to the colonel, who remarked:

"You were on the right trail, Redfern, about that parson, as you always are—except when you hanged the wrong man up in Colorado," added the commandant, with a sly wink at the youth.

"I am glad he was not hanged beyond recall, sir; but when this scout arrives which Senor Du Val wisely put upon the trail of the parson, I shall know just what to do, for now I believe the man is Blue Jacket Bill himself."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, sir."

"I had not thought of that."

"I know that he is about the height and size of Blue Jacket Bill."

"Yes?"

"But he is very round-shouldered, though that could be put on, sir, you know, under his coat."

"True."

"His hair is cut short, his beard close-shaven, while Blue Jacket wears long hair and beard, which to remove would almost disguise him."

"Very true."

"There is one thing which would betray him."

"What is that?"

"He has one blue, and one black eye."

"The parson?"

"No, sir, Blue Jacket Bill."

"And the parson?"

"Wore glasses with a bluish glass, pretending to suffer with his eyes."

"Ah!"

"That would hide the color of his eyes, sir, and I remember that the lenses of the spectacles were very large, and the frames large and fitted close under the brow and to the cheek."

"He may be your man, Redfern."

"If he is, sir, then he is also the foe of Settler Baxter, Lariat Dick's friend, and more, he is the Devil's Ranch gambler who took the name of Trent Baxter, the Sharp from Texas as well, and in him I will find the murderer of Miner Gray St. John."

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes, sir, such is my idea, and he not only murdered the miner for his money, but from a long standing revenge, for the man, I believe, was Miner Gray's boyhood foe and rival Hugh Hammond."

"If so, he means harm to the miner's wife and daughter, and I shall see that he does not carry out his plot of wrong."

"I declare, Redfern, you are a natural born detective and scout and I am led by your view of the case to place confidence in all you say."

"It is my own idea, sir, and may be wrong; but if I am right, then our man is none other than Blue Jacket Bill as well."

The orderly now entered with a report that a scout had arrived at the fort and wished to see Mr. Redfern.

"Admit him here, orderly," said the colonel, with a glance at Redfern.

Soon after Du Val's scout entered and after saluting the colonel said:

"Senor Du Val sent me, Pard Redfern, to track that old Sky Pilot Freeze, and then report to you."

"Yes, and you have done so?"

"Yes, pard, I picked up his tracks on the Blanco stage trail, and followed him to Blue Jacket Toll-Gate."

"Ah!"

"He pushed hard for the place too, as his tracks showed, but halted there for rest and fooled around on foot for some purpose I could not make out."

"But it was night when he was there."

"Well?"

"Then he lit out over the ridge, leaving the

stage trail and making for the northwest coach trails.

"Soon as I got his direction, and seen that he was dodging open trails, I came to report to you."

"You have done well, pard."

"And here is the four mates to the shoes put on Landlord Du Val's horse, which the old sky pilot got away with for sure."

He handed over the four iron shoes, which Du Val had told him to take, as they were made especially for the horse taken by Parson Freeze, and after being complimented by Colonel Rockwood on his quick and valuable work, he went out to the scout's quarters.

"Well, colonel, it looks as though I was right," said Redfern.

"More so than ever."

"When do you start?"

"As soon as it is dark, sir, and I shall go at once to Blue Jacket Toll-Gate and camp until morning."

"And Lariat Dick goes with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I predict for you success, Redfern," was the emphatic response of Colonel Rockwood.

As soon as it was dark two men rode away from the fort.

They were Redfern and Lariat Dick, and they carried a led horse with them, as though their jaunt was to be a long one.

They reached Blue Jacket Toll-Gate before midnight, and after looking to the comfort of their horses, sought rest.

With the first peep of dawn they were up and searching for the parson's trail.

Two such trailers were not long in finding it, where Du Val's scout had said it branched off from the stage trail, and they started just thirty-six hours behind the fugitive parson.

The wisdom of bringing an extra horse was soon evident, for one could always be rested from carrying the weight of a rider, and then better animals were hard to find.

They did not spare their horses, but took better care to husband their strength than had the parson to save the animal he rode, and the trail being a well-marked one, they followed without much delay, for Redfern soon got an idea just where the fugitive intended to strike for.

But trailing was slower work than going directly on one's way, and they reached the stage station just forty-eight hours behind the parson.

They learned of his going east by coach, almost immediately after his arrival at the station, and the description of the man and horse, which Redfern recognized, left no room to doubt that they were upon the right track.

But the coaches on that branch only ran once a week, so they were delayed for five days there.

Then leaving their horses in charge of the station agent, and Redfern purchasing Du Val's horse also, they took the coach eastward with the same driver who had taken the parson.

And so the trailing of the serpent was continued, slowly but surely.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### IN THE COIL OF THE SERPENT.

IT was just the kind of home where happiness should dwell, the cottage where the wife and daughter of Miner Gray St. John had found a refuge.

Mrs. St. John, a beautiful, but sad-faced woman of thirty-six, had had her share of grief and hardships, for her life had known many sorrows.

Her boy hero, Gray St. John, had become her husband when the two were hardly more than children, for she was but sixteen, he not twenty-one at the time they were married.

She had seen Gray St. John shot down by his rival, Hugh Hammond, and had nursed her lover back to life after long months of suffering.

Through poverty in their married life they had struggled, until at last, with their daughter Ethel growing in years, the father decided to try his fortunes in the gold-mines of the far West.

At first it was only disappointment.

Then came a letter full of hope, followed by a remittance, and life took on a rosy hue.

The letters and the drafts came regularly, and the mother and daughter each had a bank account building rapidly into a fortune.

They gave up the little rooms where they had kept house in Baltimore, and purchased the pretty cottage in the suburbs of the city, with its garden patch, flower plot, lawn, shade-trees, and comforts.

It was neatly furnished, and the mother and daughter at last knew what it was to live in luxury.



The far-away miner's drafts still came, and he wrote them that he, too, was building up a bank account, to place them beyond want for life—nay, to bring them in a handsome income independent of what he sent to them.

So in a couple of years Mrs. St. John began to feel that they were rich, and urge her husband to return home and enjoy the fruits of his labor.

He promised to come soon, wrote that he had a certain while yet to work, and would then place his mine in competent and honest hands, for it would still continue to yield gold for some time to come.

His letters had told how a miner had saved his life, and what friends the two had become.

In fact, all of his letters spoke of his "dear pard Trent Baxter," and he hoped he could persuade him to come home with him.

Baxter had not "struck it rich," as he had, but he had a good living from a mine, he wrote, and not a word did he say that his generosity had forced Baxter to take a share of his mine.

Then there were two weeks when no letter came, and the next one was received, and in a strange hand.

It was mailed from the fort where Gray St. John's letters came from, and with trembling fingers Mrs. St. John broke the seal, fearing that her husband was seriously ill.

The moan that broke from her lips told Ethel that it was worse, and she sprang to her mother's side to hear the low words:

"My God! Ethel, your father is dead!"

It was long before they could read the letter, and their tears came hot and fast as they did so.

It was a kind letter, and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR MRS. ST. JOHN:—

"It is with a feeling of remorse at the pain I give, that I write you the sad tidings that your devoted husband, my noble friend, is dead.

"I believe that he has mentioned me, Trent Baxter, in his letters to you, and, if so, you may know that my grief is also most poignant, for from the time I met him we were like brothers.

"He helped me to become a better man, and we had planned together to soon start for the East, where he said his home was to be my home.

"But I must tell you of his death, or all that I know.

"I was away at my mine, some thirty miles distant from Yellow Canyon, and went to spend the Sabbath with him, as was my wont.

"I arrived early in the morning, and instead of the joyous welcome I always received, all was silence at the cabin.

"But I cannot dwell upon the sad remembrance more than to say that I found my dear pard a dead man, slain by some merciless assassin, his cabin robbed, and no trace by which the murderer could be tracked.

"I buried the dear remains decently, got together what things I could find in the cabin which I thought you and your daughter would prize, his papers and books, and then gave the alarm through the country to try and capture the guilty one who had done the deed.

"But my efforts were useless, and at last I found time and calmness to write to you, one week after his death.

"He has often told me that I must be as a brother to you, as a father to Ethel, if harm befell him, and so I shall come to you and tell you all.

"You may expect me a few weeks after the reception of this letter.

"It is needless for me to add that in your deep grief you and Miss Ethel have my deepest sympathy, for I mourn with you in your great loss, and believe me ever

"Your attached friend,

"TRENT BAXTER."

"P.S.—Permit me to add here that it may be necessary for you and Miss Ethel to return with me to New Mexico, at least to the vicinity of the mine, to settle up the business complications which may arise under the circumstances of your husband's death, for he has left here certain gold which I alone know the repository of.

"I will try and bring you by a way which will be less fatiguing and dangerous than the ordinary route, and I very much fear there will be no possibility of your avoiding the trip.

"But we will talk it all over when I arrive.

"Again, in sympathy,

"T. B."

Such was the letter received by Mrs. St. John from her husband's "devoted friend."

Several weeks after the reception of this letter there drove up to the cottage a hack from which alighted a tall, handsome gentleman dressed in a stylish suit of gray.

He wore side whiskers of some six weeks' growth, his chin and upper lip being clean shaven.

His hair was white as snow, and was in curling clusters about his temples and neck.

He also wore gold-rimmed spectacles, carried a gold cane and looked like some well-to-do banker, rather than:

"MINER TRENT BAXTER,

"New Mexico."

for so read the card he sent in to Mrs. St. John.

The reception which the visitor received from both mother and daughter was a cordial one, and little did they suspect the handsome white-haired stranger was a wolf in sheep's clothing, and that they were already in the coil of the serpent.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### TRACKED TO DOOM.

Two weeks after the arrival of the man they were trailing, at the cottage of the Widow St. John, Redfern and Lariat Dick came upon the scene.

The cottage was closed, and the nearest neighbors told them that it had been sold for cash, furniture and all, by Mrs. St. John, who had gone with her daughter to live in some further west state.

Did they go alone? was asked.

"No; an elderly gentleman, with gray hair and gold spectacles had come for them!" was the response.

Then the two trailers held a consultation, and decided that the serpent had, in truth, ensnared his victims."

They made numerous inquiries, and learned that Mrs. St. John had received a letter telling her that her husband had been murdered, and then had come the white-haired gentleman for them.

A livery stable was found where the carriage had been hired that took them to the depot, and there they found that ticket had been purchased for New Orleans.

The two trailers found the very conductor with which the three had gone south, and reaching New Orleans discovered that they had stopped there for nearly two weeks.

Then they had taken the steamer for Galveston.

The trackers took the train, and arriving there followed to San Antonio, where they had remained some little time, waiting for a wagon-train going northward, it was said by those who knew.

Then, as no train was going soon, the party started by ambulance with one wagon-load of settlers who risked going, a hunter and a guide.

And upon their trail went Redfern and Lariat Dick, but days behind them still.

And one day in the timber they came upon a scene which filled them with horror, as they drew rein and threw themselves from their horses.

There before them were the charred remains of the wagon and ambulance, with the skeleton forms of the eleven people who had comprised the party, several of whom were children of the settler.

There they were, scattered about, the wolves fighting over their bones, and all telling the terrible story!

"Comanches have done this, Lariat Dick," said Redfern.

"Yes, it is their red work," was the answer.

"There were eleven in the party, Dick."

"And eleven skeletons are here."

"Yes, but we must be sure of his."

"Yes, here it is, and his white wig with it."

"You are right, and the clothes he was described in are here almost torn to pieces."

"And here are his spectacles! At last, Redfern, he has met his doom."

"Yes, but what a fearful doom to drag the others into, Dick," said Redfern as he glanced at the skeleton forms of the others of the doomed party.

"We must bury them, Redfern."

"Yes, and that man far away from the others," was the decisive reply.

The sacred duty was performed, and then the friends continued on their way until they came to the place where they must part, for Lariat Dick was to return to the home of Settler Trent Baxter.

"I shall send my report in writing, Dick, to Colonel Rockwood, for I return to Mexico to my mother, whom I some day hope to make an American of."

"I thought your parents were slain by Comanches, Redfern, for so I heard at the fort."

"My adopted parents were, but the Lady Captain of Mexico has proven to me that she is my mother, and that I was stolen from her in early boyhood."

"I avenged those I believed to be my parents, as I vowed to do, boy though I was, and now I am content to forget the past and live for the future, Dick."

"I hope we may meet again, Redfern."

"Perhaps we may, Dick, for if the settler and his daughter forgive my having been the cause of his suffering, I may drop in upon you some day, when Miss Ruth is your Ruth."

"I'll take that as a promise, Redfern," said Lariat Dick, as he grasped the hand of the youth.

And thus they parted to meet again when Redfern found indeed that both the settler and Ruth freely forgave him for having hanged an honest man for Blue Jacket Bill.

THE END.

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